University of Alberta

The Clown Uncrowns: A Critical Analysis of the Clown as a Political Character

by

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Introduction

My endeavor into a critical analysis of the clown's politics comes from a broader interest in the relationship between politics and theatre. As I learned more about modern theatre artists engaged in developing a political theatre practice, I was struck by the common use of humour in the dramatization of serious concerns and issues. The clown in particular was one figure that stood out as an important character. While reading various articles on politics and comedy in preparation for a previous paper, I came across Albert Boadella, a Catalonian director and comedian, who has consistently established his theatre practice in opposition to the ruling government. Several of his comments included in the article confirmed my interest in pursuing this research. He says, "[s]ocieties create myths, flags, constitutions, hymns etc. and the comedians, with a most ecological attitude, take on the task of bringing them down, to demonstrate the relativity of the sacred (qtd. in Lane 83)." The power Boadella accords to the comedian in society is intriguing. This discovery led me to question why the clown is a popular political comedic character and investigate the success of this artistic choice.

The clown has been a part of different cultures throughout history. S/he[1] appears in a myriad of contexts from the sacred to the profane, from the subversive to the subservient, performing on the stage, in the courts, on the street, and in the circus. Theatre has had a long affair with the clown, a character that has repeatedly appeared on the stage in a diversity of roles as for example in *commedia dell'arte*, Shakespeare, and British Pantomime. In a modern context examples of popular clown figures include

[1] Historically, the clown has most commonly been and remains a male figure. There are likely many reasons for this gender bias, that remain beyond the scope of this thesis. There is an argument that suggests the clown is neither male nor female. The argument is that the clown transcends gender, and is at the same time neither male nor female, yet both male and female. There are both male and female clowns in August and Red Noses and I will therefore consider the clown to be either gender.

Charlie Chaplin, the Fratellini Brothers, and Karl Valentin. In modern drama the clown has been an important character in the merging of low and high forms of performance that formed part of the attack waged by theatre practitioners against realism. This merger also provided new means with which to create political theatre. Although the clown has commonly been used to ridicule authority and social convention, various modern playwrights have deliberately incorporated the clown as a political character. Some examples include the work of playwrights such as Dario Fo, Bertolt Brecht, Vladimir Mayakovksy, and Peter Weiss. In all these examples, there is some sense that the clown is a kind of self portrait of each respective artist and their own role within society. The idea of the artist as clown is the subject of the exhibition The Great Parade: Portrait of the Artist as Clown on display at the National Gallery in Ottawa from 25 June-19 September 2004. The exhibit includes around two hundred works ranging from the 18th century to today, all of in which it is possible to see how the clown is used in the self portrait. [2]

The common appearance of the clown in political drama suggests there is a quality to this character that makes him/her particularly strategic. Why is the clown used in political drama and what is it about this figure that makes him/her political? These questions will be investigated using the concept of carnival as articulated by Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin. As a carnivalesque character, the clown's world outlook is rooted in a dialectic, and always stands in opposition to the official social order. The clown will be critically analyzed in two plays: August August, August[3] (1967) by Pavel Kohout, a Czech play written at a time of strict censorship about a circus clown who wants to perform a number reserved for the circus director; and Red Noses (1985) by Peter Barnes, a British play which explores the revolutionary potential of laughter in the

[2] See Milroy and Regnier.

[3] August August, August will from now on be referred to as August.

story of a clown troupe formed during the Black Death. These two plays offer contrasting examples of how the clown is used politically, yet in each play, the clown's politics are based on his/her role as a carnivalesque character. These two plays provide the chance to explore the clown in two distinct political contexts and thereby broaden the scope of understanding how the clown succeeds as a political character.

The first chapter provides a theoretical framework for the clown's politics drawing from Bakhtin's carnival theory. In this theory, Bakhtin establishes an opposition between medieval folk culture and the existing official world. Folk culture consists of many festivities including carnival, which is a temporary celebration during which established hierarchies of rank and status are suspended. Bakhtin does not deal extensively with the clown, but he does establish a role for the clown as carnival's representative in daily life. The clown then, interacts with his/her surrounding world under the laws of carnival, the result of which is a clash of carnival and the official world. This clash is what establishes the clown's politics, in that the discrepancies between carnival and the official world are exposed. Hierarchies are made apparent, authority is exposed or, at best, undermined, and power is decentralized and shared.

The clown's politics are analyzed by looking at the conventions of the clown, which are what enable him/her to expose the realities of the official world. These include the clown's identity, the clown in performance and his/her relationship to the audience, the clown's relationship to figures of authority, his/her mis/re-interpretation of language, and the clown's dialectic philosophy. To further support this discussion, the first chapter will also use Arthur Lindley's Hyperion and the Hobbyhorse and Michael Bristol's Carnival and Theater. Lindley sets up a distinction between carnival and carnivalesque, and establishes the carnivalesque as a literary device that acts to subvert a unitary and

hierarchical world. His arguments offer a useful way to understand the impact the clown has on the official social order. Bristol looks at English Renaissance theatre and uses Bakhtin's concept of carnival on a more literal level in order to understand the relationship between theatre and authority. As part of his larger analysis, Bristol discusses the clown's particular role in Renaissance theatre providing some basic characteristics of the clown that support his/her political function.

The second chapter analyzes the use of the clown in Pavel Kohout's play August, August, August, first produced in 1967. Kohout is a Czech playwright who established himself as a controversial but popular figure in the years following the second world war up to the Prague Spring in 1968. In the 1960s the Czech Communist Party's policies gradually became more liberal. Writers however, were still under constraints of censorship and political ideology. For Kohout, the clown was a strategic choice, a device to make a disguised political statement.

In August, Kohout uses the convention of the traditional auguste clown to set up a power dynamic between the clown and official world, manifested in this play as the Circus Director. As part of a political allegory, Kohout uses the clown, the lowest in the hierarchy, the one with nothing to lose and nothing to gain, to draw attention to the hierarchical and oppressive organization of power around which the circus is organized. August's ignorance and clown identity make him unaware of conventions of rank, status, language, and meaning. He therefore sees beyond the circus' fixed hierarchy and interprets orders and language literally. As a result, he repeatedly undermines the circus authority and exposes its power.

The third chapter looks at multiple clowns in Peter Barnes' play Red Noses. Barnes is a British playwright, whose political and meta-theatrical plays have established

him as a controversial and important writer. In Red Noses, first produced in 1985, Barnes uses the clown as part of a meta-theatrical treatment of comedy in a play about laughter and the power of laughter against an official world. The clown represents both the comedian/performer and also a particular philosophy. Barnes questions the political potential of comedy and explores this problem through a troupe of clowns organized by a priest, Father Flote. These clowns are contrasted with the Church authority and two other dissenting groups, the Flagellants, and the Black Ravens. In his own construction of the play and in the actions and performances of the Floties, Barnes draws attention to both the limitations and potential for comedy as political force. Throughout the play, the clown/performers expose various structures of power and oppression in the religious, political, and economic spheres.

Barnes and Kohout share a commonality in their treatment of clown in the way they both juxtapose carnival and the official world, or more accurately, the clown(s) and the character(s) of authority. Another central point that emerges in the analysis of both plays, is the significance of the clown's relationship to the audience. The red nose, the symbol of the clown, provides an iconic sign that signifies a particular mentality and behaviour to the audience. As the recognized fool, the clown has permission from the audience, as well as other characters in the play, to behave in a particular manner that might be considered inappropriate, rude, or disrespectful of other characters or persons. The clown then, is an established convention that is not only recognizable by the audience, but also informs the way s/he is used politically by playwrights, directors, performers and spectators alike.

An additional reocurring argument or theme that is established is the significance of paradox for the clown's politics. In both August and Red Noses the clown gains power

in powerlessness. As a stock character, s/he is predictable in his/her actions yet also unpredictable, and the clown also practices a behaviour that is seriously unserious. In the summer of 2003, I ventured into clown performance in a three week intensive workshop at the University of Alberta, facilitated by teacher and clown, Jan Henderson. Throughout the workshop Henderson offered to the class small phrases that capture the practice of the clown and also support the significance of the clown as a paradox: "The clown breaks every rule but his/her own; clowns live in the moment--no past, no future--and are therefore constantly changing; a clown can do anything because he is free to do nothing." These contradictions establish the clown as a character with power and freedom because they define the clown as a figure who is not bound by social convention, a definition that sets up the clown's political potential. It is this contradictory behaviour and awareness of contradiction that provide the clown with the means to undermine and expose hierarchies as well as structures of power and authority.

Clown as Carnival: A Theory of the Political Clown

Although the clown is an important figure in literature and art, his/her status as a performer makes the clown particularly significant for the theatre. The clown is a versatile figure, appearing on the stage in a variety of forms in both popular and scripted performance. S/he has played the role of the scapegoat, mascot, witty entertainer, buffoon, and trickster. Examples of clowns includes the french Pierrot, the tramp popularized by Chaplin, Joey the white faced clown, the auguste as he who gets slapped, and the cunning and lustful Arlecchino from the *commedia dell'arte* tradition.

The importance of the clown as a performer can be traced back to ancient civilizations in both Europe and Asia. Three predominant examples are the wandering minstrel, the court jester, and the comic actor. Examples of itinerant performers are many, but include the Dorian mimes from ancient Greece, the Italian *commedia dell'arte* and *giullare*, and the Russian *skomorokhi*. Their performances varied from region to region, yet they shared various methods and skills such as acrobatics, juggling, buffoonery, magic, musicianship and most significantly, improvisation[4] (Towsen 47). Some of these performers held positions as official court entertainers. Evidence suggests that early versions of such figures were persons who were mentally deficient and/or physically deformed. These court figures were often thought to have spiritual or wizardry powers, but also served as a source of entertainment. Later court fools, similar to the itinerant players, were skilled entertainers who became staples at the courts well into the sixteenth century (Welsford 55).

The third example of the clown performer is the comic actor who plays the role of

[4] See for example, Zguta, Russell. Russian Minstrels: a history of the skomorokhi. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978; Lust, Annette. From the Greek Mimes to Marcel Marceau and beyond: mimes, actors, Pierrots, and clowns: a chronical of the many visages of mime in the theatre. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2000.

the clown on stage. In this case, the actor takes on the role of a clown character that has been created by a playwright. Shakespeare for example has several clown characters such as Touchstone in As You Like It (1599-1600), Feste in Twelfth Night (1599-1600), and the Fool in King Lear (1605-06) (Welsford 251-3). The comic actor as clown might also be a stock character. Joseph Grimaldi for instance, is a key figure of the nineteenth century London stage known for his development of the Clown character in pantomime. Grimaldi had a strong influence on later clowns and many of his harlequinade tricks and gags became standards in present day circus clown acts (Towsen 151).

There is some sense that social criticism has always played a role within the tradition of clowning. In various rituals and performance traditions across Europe, Asia, and in North American Aboriginal communities, clown figures temporarily take on some form of a mock king role, as well as make a point of ridiculing conventions from the established social order (Welsford 62-75; Towsen 6-21). Other examples include traveling performers such as the Italian medieval strolling players, *giullare*, whose marketplace performances were often met with persecution by the authorities (Mitchell 11). In the twentieth century, however, politically conscious theatre practitioners began deliberately to incorporate elements from nonconventional forms of theatre such as the circus, cabaret, and street performance. Some examples include Vselvold Meyerhold (1874-1940), Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), Peter Weiss (1916-1982), Dario Fo (b.1926), Heiner Muller (1929-1995), and the foci of this thesis, Pavel Kohout (b.1928) and Peter Barnes (1931-2004). One of the concerns facing these theatre practitioners was that of representation. The predominant practice of realism did not seem adequate to portray the complexities of modern society. A central figure in all the above performance styles is the clown, who played a key role in the merger of the high and low forms of theatre. The clown's

influence is apparent in performance techniques, patterns of dialogue, as well as the choice for a play's characters. The clown offers theatre practitioners a character without ties to realism, who was useful to debase and ridicule authoritative persons, ideas, and objects.

Despite considerable differences in their theatrical practices, these theatre practitioners shared a common goal. They all sought to question the practice of realism and work to uncrown its authority, or as Benjamin would argue, its aura (221), by bringing in elements from performance practices that were considered illegitimate, vulgar, and undesirable. The integration of so called low forms of performance into high dramatic forms are useful on several levels, but primarily function to undermine theatrical convention and in turn establish new performer-audience relations. Various components of the circus, cabaret, and street performance such as montage, audience-performer interaction, spectacle, song, dance, and clowning, provide theatre practitioners a range of tools with which to create a political theatre practice. Jerzy Afanasjew, a director of the Polish avant-garde who incorporated aspects of the circus and *commedia dell'arte* in his own work, articulates the significance of unconventional performance in his essay "the World Is Not Such a Bad Place..." (1968):

> The circus. Unbridled potentiality for intersecting planes of thought. For breaking with the rules of the classic model patterned after *Sèvres*. [...] The circus. That's where you can dance Bach on the high wire, play Chopin on a piano aflame with live flames. The monster organ of our offices, the typewriter, plays Liszt (265).

Afanasjew situates the circus as a space of possibility and paradox. Not only is the high brought together with the low, removing the aura and sanctity of something such as

classical music, but anything and everything is presented as possible. Former boundaries of convention such as those that determine status, rank, and decorum, are broken, paving the way for new possibilities.

As a dramatic character, the clown is unique. What distinguishes the clown from other dramatic characters, is that although s/he predominantly exists within the world of performance, the clown also exists beyond the confines of the stage. The clown is equally present on stage as a performer as in the auditorium as a spectator (Welsford xii). In turn, the clown can step out of the action and comment or even shape the events on stage. The clown is also a figure from myth, ritual, and the social world and will therefore break theatre convention just as s/he would break other established conventions. Clown historian John Towsen articulates the particular role the clown has in the theatre as follows:

> the theater clown may be denied the clear social function of the court jester or the ritual buffoon, yet his relationship with the spectators is still remarkably direct. Often he will step out of the play and comment upon it, appearing to be as much a part of the audience as of the drama. The theater clown is a popular comic actor, but he is also a fool who is free to ignore all dramatic conventions while at the same time taking part in the story on stage (31).

Beyond the presence of the clown on the stage and in the auditorium, the clown also has an extra-literary existence. Because the clown is an iconic figure, s/he is already known to an audience beyond a specific text or performance. The word clown holds meaning on its own. In his documentary style film The Clowns (1971), Federico Fellini explores the way the circus clowns from his youth reminded him of persons he knew from his community.

For him, there was some identification between what he saw in the behaviour of the clowns and the behaviour or character of these particular persons. The suggestion is that "clown" already has significant meaning without reference to a specific clown character, performance, or play text. Clown then, is more than just a theatrical character. The clown will signify for an audience a philosophy, a way of seeing the world that is distinct and unique. This way includes naiveté, innocence, ignorance, impertinence, cunning, wit, freedom and others. The clown then, is a theatrical convention, one that is recognizable by a theatre audience. When a playwright includes a clown, or a clownesque character, the audience will already have, or at least think they have, a concept of who this character is. The playwright can then further establish this particular concept, or play with the concept to lead the audience in a different direction.

The move away from conventional forms of theatre in the early to mid twentieth century, speaks in part to the ideological implications of theatre and its performance. The relationship between audience and performer, character development, and the means through which the story is presented all suggest a particular ideological perspective on society. This position has resulted in the development of performance methods that counter the practice of realism. The aesthetic and practice of the clown offers a method of performance that supports this particular goal.

In his theoretical and dramatic work, Brecht sought to develop a new theatre that would respond to the ideological implications of performance. His arguments provide a theoretical basis to support the politics of the clown. Brecht did not necessarily include clowns as characters in his plays, but he was influenced by the capacity a clown performance had to draw attention to contradiction. Brecht's concern lies in the way bourgeois theatre prevents its audience from having a critical perspective on the events on

stage. Through the method of alienation, Brecht wants his audience to acquire distance from the dramatic action, so they can make a critical assessment of what has occurred. Additionally, Brecht is critical of the way bourgeois theatre smooths over contradictions creating an ideal on stage. In his "Appendices to the Short Organum" he argues, that "if there is any development [in bourgeois theatre] it is always steady, never by jerks; the developments always take place within a definite framework which cannot be broken through" (277). Imperative for Brecht is that theatre lay bare the inherent contradictions that exist in the social world. Brecht writes, "[t]he theatre of the scientific age is in a position to make dialectics into a source of enjoyment. The unexpectedness of logically progressive or zigzag development, the instability of every circumstance, the joke of contradiction and so forth" (277).

In developing his theatre aesthetic, Brecht drew from a variety of sources, one of which is the German clown-performer, Karl Valentin (1882-1948). In his performance Valentin practiced what critics have termed "vertrackte Dialektik," a perverted logic. Brecht admired Valentin's ability to both play a character and criticize it at the same time and it was in this respect that Valentin came to influence Brecht's emphasis on the physicalization of ideas (Case 9). In Valentin's clownesque theatrical practice Brecht encountered a performance method that dramatized contradiction. The clown not only creates alienation, but is rooted in a performance method that emphasizes instability, zigzag development, and unexpectedness.

Italian writer, director, and performer Dario Fo has also developed a theatre that recognizes the ideological implications of the clown. As part of his aesthetic Fo draws heavily on the "unofficial and illegitimate theatre" (Mitchell 11) of the *giullare*, Italian medieval strolling players. The *giullare* were "the choral, didactic expression of an entire

community" (Binni qtd. in Mitchell 11). In his political theatre, Fo attempts to recreate this aesthetic in order to develop a performance that is rooted in a particular relationship between audience and performer. Fo argues, "[i]f I seek out collective problems, what I'm saying and the language I use will be different: it'll be forced to be epic, because it's based on a clear ideological fact-the idea of community, of a communion of interests, social interests, interests of living together, producing together and sharing proceeds" (qtd. in Schechter, Satiric Impersonations 94). Fo wants to create a performance that makes a direct political statement, but one that also keeps the audience critically aware. From the practices of the *giullare,* Fo found methods in which to make this possible. For instance, the *giullare* always used direct address, a central component of Fo's work. Fo explains that the *giullare* would use direct address, "to enable them [the audience] to participate in the events on stage with a constant awareness of [the fiction of the events]" (qtd. in Mitchell 14). Additionally, Fo is sure to avoid the development of psychologically motivated characters. He often uses onomatopoeic language and Grammelot, a phonic abstract sound system, two nonconventional systems of language Fo supports with gesture and physical expression. The point is to dramatize concepts and ideas over character (Mitchell 13).

The influence of the clown's aesthetic on political theatre is evident in the work of Fo and Brecht. But the clown him/herself as a performer has also played a key role in political performance. This political role is evident in pre-revolutionary Russia. It is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with the important relationship between the Russian circus and theatre, but several key artists and performances are significant. In the 1880s, when the talking clown was at its height of popularity in Europe, Russian clowns took on a deliberate political role, and came to play a significant part in the revolution

(Towsen 307). Amidst growing political unrest in the late nineteenth century against the authority of the Czar, the clown became the performer who could make political statements as his unwritten performance avoided the authority of the censors. The Durov Brothers, Anatoly (1864-1916) and Vladimir (1863-1934), were perhaps the first Russian clowns to deliberately include political commentary into their acts. Their entrance into the circus ring began with the opening line: "King of jesters, but never the king's jester! The Jester to His Majesty the People!" Many skits involved associating bureaucrats and other authorities with pigs. For example, Durov trained a pig to leave the ring and head for a box where the bureaucrats sat. As the pig left the ring Durov exclaimed: "What, you wretched beast. So you're deserting me to rejoin your family?" (Towsen 315). This example enforces the significance of clown-audience relations in the clown's politics. In this case, the Durov brothers established alliances with parts of the audience in order to ridicule the officials who were also present.

In the years preceding the 1917 revolution, the clown and the circus played an important role in the movement against realism (see Towsen 319-324). Marinetti's "Variety Theater Manifesto" (1913) was influential in this regard. Included in his list of the elements of "the Futurist marvelous" are characteristics reminiscent of the clown. For example his list includes, "j) the whole gamut of stupidity, imbecility, doltishness and absurdity," "n) caricatures suffering and nostalgia [...] grave words made ridiculous by funny gestures, bizarre disguises, mutilated words, ugly faces, pratfalls" (quoted in Towsen 320).

Clown Vitaly Lazarenko (1890-1939) became the central figure amidst these new developments in the theatrical avant garde. Lazarenko was a circus performer, devoted to the Bolshevik cause, who began to incorporate satire into his acrobatic acts. Lazarenko

also became an important stage performer collaborating with theatre practitioners such as Vladimir Mayakovksy and Vsevold Meyerhold (Schechter 84; Leach 164). The political potential of the circus was not lost on the new communist government. In 1919, the circus was nationalized and controlled by a central committee and in 1926, a circus training school was founded (Towsen 324-5).

It is clear that throughout the twentieth century the clown has played an important role in the development of a political theatre aesthetic. A preliminary assumption suggests there are particular characteristics of the clown that make him/her suitable for political performance. Some of these characteristics have been briefly noted, but require a more in depth critical analysis.

The Political Clown

In Rabelais and His World, Mikhail Bakhtin analyzes the significance of what he calls the "two-world condition" of medieval people and their culture (6). He argues that in addition to the official and feudal social order, there also existed a second order of life that was "nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical" (6). This concept of a second order provides a basis for looking at the clown as a political character. In Bakhtinian terms, the clown's politics occurs in his/her capacity to "uncrown" (Bakhtin 11) authority. Authority holds many meanings. It can refer to characters or persons of high status and power, to manifestations of power as for example in language, as well as to issues of ownership with respect to a narrative, as in who owns the story, as well as who has agency within the story.

Uncrowning is a form of debasing, which removes the mystery and prestige of authority. This idea suggests that by bringing authority to a material level, in relationship to the mundane of the everyday, its prestige and status is undermined thereby subverting

its power. The idea of uncrowning forms a central part of Bakhtin's theory of carnival. Carnival theory encompasses a wide spectrum of literary and dramatic theory rooted in Bakhtin's analysis of medieval folk culture. Bakhtin grounds his arguments in analyses of various novels including the work of Rabelais and Doestyevsky. Largely ignoring theatre, for Bakhtin, the novel is the form of literature in which for him carnival is most apparent. Bakhtinian theory, however, has been used extensively in dramatic criticism. Two works of note are Michael Bristol's Carnival and Theater and Arthur Lindley's Hyperion and the Hobbyhorse. Both critics' discussion on the relevance of carnival for theatre offer additional interpretations of carnival that will be useful in building an argument on the politics of the clown.

The central argument that drives Bakhtin's argument is that medieval culture is characterized by a duality. This duality consists of the popular folk culture which opposes the official feudal order. Folk culture includes "festivities of the carnival type, the comic rites and cults, the clowns and fools, giants, dwarfs, and jugglers" and "the literature of parody" (Bakhtin 4). Bakhtin outlines three main components of folk culture: ritual spectacle, comic verbal composition, and various genres of billingsgate (Bakhtin 4-5), all three of which are interrelated.

Most relevant to an analysis of the clown's politics is Bakhtin's discussion of the ritual spectacle, later described as carnival, which refers to such festivities as carnivals, pageants, and processions. Carnival offers " a completely different nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations" (Bakhtin 6). Bakhtin establishes carnival as a second life experienced collectively during which the singular authority of the official order as realized in the Church, the feudal system and work, is temporarily suspended (Vice 150). As a result, new relations

between persons are established which negate the existing hierarchies.

The opposition between carnival and the official world is rooted in an opposition between change and stasis, transience and fixedness. The official feasts are "the triumph of a truth already established, the predominant truth [is] put forward as eternal and indisputable" (Bakhtin 9). The completeness of the official world denies the existence of alternate possibilities of organization, authority, ideas, or language. In contrast, carnival is a "celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it mark[s] the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (Bakhtin 10). Carnival allows for a multiplicity of possibilities during which no prevailing organization or ideas dominate.

The suspension of norms requires new forms of meaning and communication (10). In carnival signs and signifiers are not fixed, objects find numerous purposes and rank and status become meaningless. Carnival seeks "a dynamic expression; it demand[s] ever changing, playful undefined forms" (Bakhtin 11). All carnival symbols are imbued with a sense of change, renewal and of relativity. The logic that prevails is the logic of the inside out, of top to bottom, front to rear, crownings and uncrownings. According to Bakhtin, carnival is a kind of "world inside out" (11). More than simply suspending rank and status, carnival inverts the established hierarchical relations. As a "world inside out," in carnival, clowns becomes kings and kings, clowns.

Carnival theory also emphasizes the bringing down to earth or a bringing to the body all that is abstract and of the mind. The authority of the official world is debased as it is brought closer to the material world of daily existence and in turn loses its naturalized, unchanging, and powerful status (Vice 152). A merging of the prestigious and the lowly occurs, breaking up the boundaries that have been neatly ordered and separated.

This is opposed to the official order that "is founded on the principle of an immovable and unchanging hierarchy in which higher and lower never merge" (qtd. in Vice 158). Kings and clowns share a collective space and authority is dispersed and shared.

Bakhtin accords a central role to laughter as the basis around which carnival is organized. Carnival laughter is a distinct kind of laughter that plays a central role in subverting the existing hierarchical social order. It is an ambivalent laughter that mocks and celebrates simultaneously (Bakhtin 8-11). This form of laughter is "not an individual reaction to some isolated "comic" event." Rather, this laughter is of all the people and directed even at the participants themselves. In contrast the "satirist whose laughter is negative places himself above the object of his mockery, he is opposed to it" (12). The manifestation of this laughter is evident in the significance of parody, which forms the centre of carnival's verbal component.

The literature of parody is filled with the carnival spirit that renounces rank and sees the world "in its laughing aspect." This comic literature includes work in both Latin and the vernacular and emphasizes the parody of all things that belong to the official order (13). Examples include parodies of sermons, hymns, dialogues and debates as well as prayers and legends of the saints. Bakhtin argues that through this rampant parody of the religious cult, laughter invades "the walls of universities, and schools" (13-14). In this context, parody becomes a new structuring principle. The laughter resulting from parody debases all that is serious and rooted within the official order. With the prevalence of parody, laughter, and the body, the result of carnival is familiar communication that occurs across rank and status. The divisions established by the official hierarchy no longer prevail and freedom reigns. Laughter has the power to "degrade[s] and materialize[s]" (Bakhtin 20). These various components of carnival are indicative of the celebration of a

second life and the mocking of the established order that in turn provides a temporary liberating experience where freedom becomes a reality.

This concept of carnival is rather utopian and romantic. Bakhtin strongly emphasizes the collective and experiential aspect of carnival which further distinguishes it from the official order. The people are not outside observers, but full participants sharing in the festivities and ceremony. Bakhtin places carnival on "the borderline between art and life. In reality, it is life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern of play" (7). He argues that as a utopian realm, carnival is ruled only by the "laws of its own freedom" where community and equality reign (Bakhtin 7-8). Bakhtin positions carnival itself as a powerful dissenting force. There is merit in this argument, but it is also limited in its capacity to analyze the political potential of the clown. The presence of carnival indicates the existence of an oppressive authority. Disrupting this authority is an important act of dissent, but what happens when carnival ends?

The fact that carnival ends, is a significant point that needs to be noted. Although Bakhtin sets up carnival as a space of liberation from the prevailing social order, he also outlines carnival according to specific times. For instance, he notes the relationship of carnival to religious and agricultural festivals such as "the feast of fools," "the feast of the ass," "Easter laughter" and "the harvesting of grapes (*vedange)*" all of which are "consecrated by tradition" (5). All these various festivals had a "comic folk aspect" and "a carnival atmosphere" and were "marked by fairs and varied open-air amusements" as well as "ceremonies and rituals" in which "clowns and fools, constant participants in these festivals, mimicked serious rituals" (5). Additionally, Bakhtin defines carnival as a "*temporary* liberation (my italics)" and argues that it "marked the *suspension* of all hierarchal rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (10 my italics). Carnival then, is

linked to particular periods of time that allow for a temporary opposition to the official order. Carnival is not a constant, nor does it remove or replace the existing order. For a designated period of time, the existing social order is reversed, upturned, and mocked. But once carnival ends, the order is restored and the established hierarchies and social norms prevail. There is a limitation to carnival's capacity to uncrown and disrupt authority. What then, is the significance of carnival, as a *temporary suspension* of existing social norms, for the clown? How does carnival help theorize how the clown functions as a political character?

Bakhtin credits the clown with an important role in carnival, one which exists beyond the temporary celebrations. He argues: "Clowns and fools [...] are characteristic of the medieval culture of humor. They were the constant accredited representatives of the carnival spirit in everyday life out of carnival season" (8). The clown lives in a constant state of carnival, treating the world around him accordingly. As a result, the clown repeatedly comes up against the official world as it exists outside carnival. This relationship between clown and official order sets up the necessary juxtaposition of official versus unofficial; change versus stasis; order versus disorder. It is in this power struggle between clown (carnival) and authority (official order) that the clown's politics are established. In this instance, the clown functions to "interrogate dystopias [rather] than to establish utopias" (Lindley 24). The clown's politics occurs because of the ways in which the clown exposes the hierarchy, the game, the fiction and/or the repressive nature of the official world. By looking at the performance, philosophy, and persona of the clown, his/her ability to participate in the interrogation of dystopias will become clear. The clown as carnivalesque is evident in his/her relationship to authority, his/her refusal to acknowledge difference, his/her lack of fixed identity, and his/her particular use

and understanding of language.

The Clown and the Structural Distribution of Power

Central to the establishment of the clown's politics is his/her relationship to authority and/or the official order. This particular relationship allows for the dramatization of the power struggle between carnival and the official order. Within the tradition of clown performance there is a convention for the clown to perform in relation to someone or thing that is his/her superior. As Fo points out, the question for the clown is always, "who's in command, who's the boss?" He argues further that "[i]n the world of clowns there are two alternatives: to be dominated, [...] or else to dominate" (172). This relationship could occur between two clowns, a clown and the ringmaster/ director/master of ceremonies, or a clown and a character of high status such as a king, master, boss, or the audience. Within these various underling/master relationships, the clown can take on many different guises. What remains consistent, is that the clown always remains a figure of inferiority. This form of relationship is evident for example in the circus in which a clown will always have at least two participants in order to establish "a basic dichotomy in [their] status " (Bouissac 164). The dichotomy is most evident between the white-faced clown, who conforms in the extreme to established cultural codes, and the clown proper, whose complete lack of conformity situates him as a direct opposite (Bouissac 164). This dichotomy can take on many forms with different characters substituting for the role of the Joey and Auguste.

In addition to the clown's relationship with a character of authority, the clown is also always in relationship with the audience. The audience's role is either as the clown's ally or enemy. The clown might seek to make an alliance with the audience, as for example in August, that is established in a common discontent with the character of

authority. The audience however, might also represent to the clown an authority. In such a situation, the clown might aim to please the audience. The clown allows the audience to think they have the power, but s/he remains in control of his/her performance. In another scenario, the clown might hold power over the audience. A recent performance at the Edmonton Street Performer's Festival, 2004, by Canadian clowns Mump and Smoot, two clown characters created by Michael Kennard and John Turner, is indicative of this particular audience-performer relationship. These two clowns needed the audience to help them in bringing a performer back from the dead by bowing down to their god, Umo. This scenario required the audience to raise their hands, a condition the two clowns strictly enforced. In this situation, the audience had to conform to the clowns' rules and they were ridiculed for their indifference to the moment of performance. Despite the varying power relationships between the clown and the audience, the paradox of power characteristic of the clown remains consistent. Whether the clown is trying to please, ally with, or control the audience, s/he is always playing with the audience's expectations of what the clown is, and ridicules the audience for their presumptions and pretensions.

The relationship the clown has with a superior character and/or the audience sets up a particular performance dynamic that dramatizes the power relations. When these scenarios take on a political bent, the person of authority often represents an official social order. The official order can refer to different hierarchical structures as for example patriarchy, capitalism, communism, or religion. There are several main characteristics that all these structures of order share. As Bakhtin emphasizes, the official order is based upon differences of power. These differences are the foundation for the establishment and reproduction of the official social order. As a result, rather than appearing as a constructed or an imposed organization of power, an official social order is perceived as

natural and eternal. The above mentioned examples are all based on difference and they are all argued by their proponents as natural and/or unchanging. Women are the weaker sex, the king is ordained by God, and the poor have only themselves to blame. When a performer or playwright exploits this relationship the power dynamic between carnival (clown) and official world (authority) is placed at the forefront, open to audience scrutiny.

Clown and Contradiction

This clash of the carnival against the official order results in a dramatization of the debasing and demystification of power. The clown breaks down the orderly management and assertion of power creating instability within a supposedly stable organization. In turn the clown is able to reduce "Authority" to "authority" (Lindley 39). Authority with a small "a" is changeable and vulnerable. On the other hand, Authority is centralized, maintaining power in the hands of a few. Take for instance the Floties in Barnes' Red Noses. This group of clown offers an alternative philosophy of the world and is seen as a threat to the established powers. Flote's religious philosophy offers individuals the opportunity to know God in laughter negating the hierarchical organization of the Church. As a result, on the Pope's orders this troupe of clowns meet their death (Barnes, Red Noses 104-7).

The official order thrives on "the triumph of a truth already established" (Bakhtin 9). In order to maintain itself, the official order puts forth an image of unity, in which each level within the hierarchy is neatly compartmentalized. In contrast, carnival is "hostile to all that [is] immortalized and completed" (Bakhtin 10). Similarly the clown denies any sense of completion or closure suggesting his/her carnivalesque outlook is rooted in a recognition of the inevitability of change and the inherent reality of social contradiction. In

his/her actions and behaviour the clown draws attention to the way the official order attempts to maintain a smooth operation of power.

In his theoretical work as well as in his plays, Brecht attempts to develop a means of dramatizing the inherent contradictory nature of the social world. He argues that "[t]he bourgeois theatre's performances always aim at smoothing over contradictions, at creating false harmony, at idealization" (277). To combat the smoothing over, Brecht argues that contradiction should be made evident on stage. Contradiction is rooted in dialectics which suggests that "every historically developed form is in a state of change" (Schechter 34). Brecht's theatre is premised on the changeability of society, a perspective which has the potential to be a source of humour, as well as one that is recognized and practiced by the clown.

In Walter Benjamin, Eagleton cites Brecht's comment: "I have never found anybody without a sense of humour who could understand dialectics" (143). Elizabeth Wright provides some insight into a Brechtian analysis of comedy. Wright argues that what is clear in Brecht's theoretical work is that he considered the comic to be historically bound. There are no innate human qualities that are funny. Rather, comedy is found in the nature of society (Wright 49-50). Eagleton further articulates a Brechtian concept of comedy and argues that Brecht's comedy "lies in its insight that any place is reversible, any signified may be become a signifier, any discourse may be without warning rapped over the knuckles by some meta-dicourse which may then suffer such rapping in turn" (160). This awareness of the changeability of social structures, meaning, and ideas, is reminiscent of Bakhtin's argument in carnival. The humour lies in the way authority appears vulnerable when this changeability or these contradictions are made apparent.

As a political character, the clown plays a key role in making apparent these very

contradictions. Marxist critic Leszek Kolakowski provides a sense of this role for the clown in his discussion on the philosophy of the jester. He argues,

> The jester's constant effort is to consider all possible reasons for contradictory ideas. It it thus dialectical by nature--simply the attempt to change what is because it is. He is motivated not by a desire to be perverse but by distrust of a stabilized system. In a world where apparently everything has already happened, he represents an active imagination defined by the opposition it must overcome (54).

A dialectical perspective of the social world demands a recognition of multiplicity in all aspects: the multiplicity of meaning, of the self, of power, and of authority. In his/her denial of "all that is completed" the clown treats the surrounding world as a constantly mutating, transient social order. The fixed hierarchies and signifiers the official world imposes are meaningless to the clown. When the clown treats the apparent fixed social world as transient s/he in turn exposes the contradictions embedded within structures of power.

The Clown and Difference

Despite the obvious power dynamic that is dramatized between the clown and a superior, the clown is often oblivious to this power structure. As a carnivalesque character, the clown lives in a context in which hierarchies of rank and status are suspended. In his refusal to acknowledge difference, the clown draws attention to the very existence of difference. For example in August August, August, August sees no reason why he should not be a circus director. He interacts with both the Ringmaster and the Circus Director as if they are his equals. In the spirit of carnival, the clown, either by ignorance or rebellion, sees no distinction of rank or status. For the clown, his/her

relationship to the king is no different than his/her relationship to his fellow clown. Bristol articulates this position in the context of English Renaissance theatre:

> The exchange of identity is easy for the clown, because he refuses to take seriously any discriminations of rank, status or individuality. He calls everyone Ned, including Prince Edward, and is on terms of candid familiarity with every other character. The clown in a versatile substitute whose resourcefulness is derived from his inability or refusal to understand differences (140).

It is precisely this refusal or inability of the clown to recognize difference that sets up his/her political position. By ignoring distinctions in rank or status, the clown also defies any static definitions of identity. Difference then, refers to two factors. Firstly is the distinction between persons based on identity. Secondly, is the hierarchy of this distinction, which results in a social order organized on the basis of status. The king is defined in a particular way distinct from the fool. In addition, the king is positioned as superior to the fool and in turn holds more power. The maintenance of this hierarchy requires a fixed identity that conforms to the hierarchical organization.

Lindley argues that carnival "enacts the subversion of a world that is apparently ordered, unitary, hierarchic, and explicitly known, as well as the type of personality defined by and dependent on that order" (39). The official order requires a personality that conforms to the hierarchy and accepts its own position within it. In order for the authority of the king to maintain power, his status as divine ruler needs to be recognized by those beneath him. Those beneath him also need to accept their position below the king and submit to his power. This issue is one of central concern to Peter Barnes. In Red Noses, he draws attention to the way individuals will submit to authority to ensure

certainty over chaos. In their submission, these characters end up contributing to the reproduction of power. Each individual plays a particular role within the hierarchy which is necessary to maintain the balance of order and power. Therefore, the moment the king's position is questioned or his authority is not recognized his power is undermined. Similarly, when an underling believes s/he can also be King, or sees beyond his/her fixed social role, the stability of the social order is at risk.

Further subverting the personality of the official order, carnival also subverts the notion of individuality. In carnival "the self [is] revealed to be disordered, multiplex, indefinite, unknown" (Lindley 39). This argument reiterates the emphasis in carnival of multiplicity. Carnival refutes the existence of static signifiers. Meaning in carnival is not fixed, rather carnival "represents the arbitrary transitoriness of all social forms" (Bristol 65). In this context, identity and self are no longer fixed or unified. Lindley pursues two arguments from this initial position. The multiplicity of the self can be revealed by characters whose authority, which based on their perceived stability and coherence, is lost in the context of carnival. Secondly, carnival makes apparent this multiplicity by revealing identity as a mask or role persons play within the game of the official order (39). Identity and self are defined by the official order and are therefore both arbitrary and unstable.

Lindley's interpretation of the carnivalesque is useful in analyzing the clown's political function because he rejects the way Bakhtin emphasizes carnival's utopian aspect. Lindley emphasizes what he argues is the way carnival is "antitaxonomic" and how it results in the "deconstruction of social authority," a change from "singularity to multiplicity" and a shift from the "organization around one king" to the "disorganization around many kings" (23). These themes Lindley relates to the carnivalesque emphasize a world where power is not invested in a singular authority or bound by particular

categories. The focus is on multiplicity which demands a sharing of power and the elimination of its coercive centralization. By creating multiplicities the carnivalesque in turn draws attention to the official order's singularity. According to Lindley, Bakhtin's argument allows for a vision of "the official world as a game and official and social identity as the arbitrary assignment of role that is characteristic of games" (Lindley 24). As a theatrical character the clown literally plays the game of the official world by refusing to take its authority seriously. Rather than participating as a subject within the official world, the clown plays *the role of the subject* always keenly aware that s/he is part of a game of power.

In playing this game, the clown subverts fixed notions of self and identity by revealing multiplicity in others as well as in his/her own identity as clown. The clown is him/herself a fixed identity, one which the audience and other characters recognize immediately. But paradoxically, the stability of the clown allows in turn for a dynamic sense of identity. Not only does the clown take on the role of other characters and persons, but the clown refuses to accept the fixed identity required for the maintenance of the official hierarchy. When August expresses his desire to become the Circus Director he is defying the unsaid rules of the circus hierarchy. His desire makes apparent his lack of conformity to his position as clown at the lowest end of the order. Similarly, the clown's open questioning of this hierarchy can potentially create an instability in the identity of an authority figure. When August asks why the Ringmaster is not the Director, the clown succeeds in de-stabilizing the Ringmaster's position. Suddenly the Ringmaster's stable identity within the circus is questionable.

The clown succeeds in revealing the social mask of identity in his/her ability to easily exchange identity (Bristol 140). A good example is the Maniac in Fo's play

Accidental Death of an Anarchist (1970). The Maniac is a character who has no concrete identity. He first enters as a mental patient who has been brought into the police station for interrogation. Looking over the Maniac's file, Bertozzo says, "[t]his isn't the first time you've been up for impersonation is it? In all you have been arrested...let me see...Twice as a surgeon, three times as a bishop, army captain, tennis umpire" (Fo 2). As the play continues, the Maniac impersonates a police inspector as well as a magistrate, identities he uses as catalysts in making apparent the police's guilt. Similarly, in Barnes' Red Noses three clowns/performers impersonate lawyers in the staging of a mock trial. August also plays the game of impersonation as he completes each condition and conforms to the social conventions of the circus.

By impersonating another character the clown makes identity appear as a social mask that can be easily exchanged for another. Not only is identity destabilized, but its authority is devalued. If a clown can successfully play the role of a judge or lawyer their position is de-essentialized and presented as nothing more than construction.

As part of the negation of individuality, within a play/performance the clown denies the development of a psychologically motivated individual. In turn, the use of the clown establishes the potential to deal with structural issues. Without the emphasis on individuality, the clown draws attention to how structures of power shape identity and choice. Sue Ellen Case notes this strength of the clown in her discussion on Valentin. Rather than constructing a dramatic narrative that focuses on the development of a central character, Case argues that Valentin creates a character that focusses dramatic action on the power structures inherent in social convention and discourse (7). The psychology of the clown is irrelevant to the unfolding of the scenario. The clown forces the events on stage to be explored on a different level then they might be in a realist drama. Emotional

responses remain important but on a superficial level. For example, in August, his desire to show the Lippizaner horses is an emotional response. However, this emotion is not there to show the intricate inner workings of this clown's mind. Rather, this overbearing desire is what catapults August into action to meet the necessary conditions. The result is the repeated undermining of the Director as well as the the exposure of the circus hierarchy's rigidity. The emotion serves to expose power structures, as distinct from its role or purpose in a more realist theatre.

The Clown's Interpretation of Meaning and Language

In the world of the clown, difference also has to do with how authority has a part in determining meaning that in turn separates objects, titles, and conventions into a hierarchy. The ruling power establishes its authority in part by assigning meaning to social positions and acts in turn determining their value and importance (Henkle 213). A hierarchy is established in which certain persons, ideas, objects, and words are considered to be more important than others. Meaning is derived from a social context determined by the official order. An example of how authority arbitrarily controls meaning occurs in Weiss's How Mister Mockinpott Was Cured of His Suffering (1968). At one point Mockinpott is at the doctor's office where he is undergoing a series of tests. One test involves the use of flashcards. The Doctor explains: "Now tell us what is represented by each picture as the card's presented." The nurse holds up the first picture.

MOCKINPOTT. (*with an effort*) Moon.

DOCTOR. (*very quickly*) Sun.

This exchange continues through several more pictures. Finally the doctor comes back to the first picture. Mockinpott is eager to show he learned from his first try and identifies the picture as "Sun." Jack Pudding, who assists Mockinpott in solving his problems and

brought him to the doctor in the first place, cries out "Moon" (Weiss 193-4). It would not have mattered what Mockinpott had said. The decision had already been made for him.

Bristol emphasizes Bakhtin's concern with the various ways in which authority and power are manifested. At issue is how authority is dispersed, whether it be centralized within a small group or person, or decentralized amongst many (19). What is key, is how authority is influenced. In understanding how authority functions, Bakhtin finds a central role for language, which for him is the manifestation of ideology, ideas, and opinions that include not only verbal exchanges but physical actions, gestures, and the organization of space and time (Bristol 21). A centralized authority will enforce a particular form of language to ensure the maintenance of power and control. But the manifestation of authority in language also establishes the potential for its power to be undermined. By reorganizing the semiotic material of language, it is possible to force the dispersion of authority as well as draw attention to its coercive role. In the way the clown uses and interprets language, s/he succeeds in undermining its authority.

To further articulate this argument, it is useful to continue with the example of the fool and the king. For Bakhtin, the power of laughter lies in the way it uncrowns the seriousness of various components of the official order. Laughter creates an irreverence for persons, ideas, and objects of power that maintain their authority by means of strict order and hierarchy. In the clown's treatment of the social world as a world of carnival, s/he will treat objects and symbols from the official order without the customary respect. Take the object of the crown. A crown is a hat worn by a king that is socially inscribed with power. A crown in turn becomes a symbol of power, wealth, and authority. For a clown, a crown is simply a hat. In fact, a crown might not even be a hat, but a soup bowl, or an aquarium for a fish. A crown might be created out of a water bucket. This "symbolic

anarchy of carnival" means the clown is interpreting the world according to his/her own rules (Bristol 67), throwing into question those already in existence. The assignation of meaning is authority's game of power. Playing with fixed signifiers, as the clown does, offers a counter game that subverts the authority's game of power (Henkle 213).

The tradition of clown performance in the circus illustrates the various ways the clown mis/re-interprets meaning. In his semiotic analysis of the circus Paul Bouissac argues the clown's act is based on a cultural code that functions in relation to the codes that exist outside of the circus. These cultural codes are based on a set of rules that the clown is likely to reject in favour of an alternate method of communication (Bouissac 169). Bouissac uses the example of a classic clown performance still performed in the modern Parisian circus of which there are several variations. A white faced clown announces a performance by a violin virtuoso. The Auguste clown enters with a violin case, dressed in formal concert attire, and bows to the audience. He then,

> opens the case and extracts from it first a napkin, which he ties around his neck, then a bottle of cheap wine. He drinks noisily from the bottle, wipes his mouth, and puts the bottle and the napkin back in the case. He bows again to the audience--and is driven out of the ring by his outraged partner (Bouissac 171).

Bouissac points out that in this act, the clown brings together two oppositional categories of noise, eating and music (Bouissac 171). Although the two can be associated in the context of dinner and fine music, in this act there is a clash of bodily function (carnival) and classical music (abstract and of the mind). In this act the clown disrupts the neatly ordered hierarchy that separates things of the body from that of the mind in his re-interpretation of a cultural code.

The way the clown interprets meaning in language provides further evidence as to how the clown disrupts authority. Bristol argues that the clown knows both the wrong and the right side of language. The clown separates words from things thereby exposing the "socially inscribed rationality" of language (141). The significance, status, and convention imbedded in the meaning of words is not part of the clown's understanding of the world. The clown does not follow the rules of the official order in which language is also a part. The way a clown treats language involves several strategies and/or errors. These examples include literalization, misinterpretation, as well as what Sue Ellen Case calls a distortion of logic (10). What occurs as a result of all three examples is a disruption in the direction of the dialogue as well as the diversion of an order directed by the authority figure. In turn the clown successfully weasels his/her way out of a task, delays the completion of the task, and/or brings attention to the arbitrary assignation of meaning (Henkle 213). The way a clown will use language differs according to the circumstances of a given situation. There is some ambivalence as to whether the clown knows the rules of the official order and chooses not to follow them, or if s/he is unaware of the rules in the first place. Most likely both are equally true making the political clown that much more powerful. The clown can be the innocent or play the innocent and use it to his/her advantage.

Case looks at the significance of language in her essay on Karl Valentin. She argues that the scenarios Valentin writes are not built on plot, but on a relationship between authority and an underling who are locked in a power struggle rooted in language (9). The power struggle revolves around the ordering of a task by the authority to be completed by the underling. The underling always manages to escape the task through his verbal interaction with the authority. Case identifies two main ways the underling accomplishes

this goal, through a distortion of logic as well as a fantasy flight (10). The distortion of logic is clear in the example Case provides from a sketch of Valentin's entitled "Tingel Tangel." Right before this exchange, the Music Director has asked for the light to be fixed.

> VALENTIN. Why didn't you tell us yesterday that it didn't work?
>
> DIRECTOR. Because yesterday it did work.
>
> VALENTIN. Aha! So yesterday it worked, then it wouldn't have made sense to fix it yesterday since it can't do any more than work.
>
> DIRECTOR: Let's don't discuss it any more (qtd. in Case 10).

The expected form of communication when an authority orders an underling to complete a task is the underling will obey. When the underling avoids or delays the completion of the task by misunderstanding or respinning the meaning the authority is undermined. In this particular example, Valentin seems to be deliberately tricking the Director. Rather than acting the innocent, by manipulating the Director's words Valentin succeeds in causing enough frustration so the matter is not pursued any further.

The interplay of language and interpretation plays out quite differently in August August, August. Throughout the play are examples of literalization as well as misinterpretation of words. In this case, as a classic auguste clown, August is not intentionally undermining the circus authority, he simply does not understand. After creating a woman out of a doll for August the Ringmaster and Circus Director coach the clown in his marriage proposal. August, having never proposed to a woman and not aware of the social conventions of proposal follows their directions word for word. The Director says, "I will prompt you through everything: bouquet...(1-18)" and August hands the Director the bouquet assuming he asked for it. Angry the Director responds,

"You blockhead!" and following orders August expressed this sentiment to the woman, "You blockhead!" This exchange continues and by the end the sanctity of the proposal has been completely destroyed.

Dispersion of Authority

The above discussion illustrates various ways by which the clown demystifies authority and in turn undermines its power. A secondary result of the clown's actions is the dispersion of authority. By asserting his/her own agency within a play the clown ensures power is not centralized. As a result, the clown negates the authority's overarching power and control. This is apparent in August. Despite the control the Ringmaster and Director purport to have, August repeatedly disrupts the order of the circus performance with his own acts, momentarily usurping the Ringmaster's and Director's control. But in addition to the characters of authority, there is also the issue of who has authority over the narrative. The clown opens up the possibility for a shared ownership over the events created on stage.

Bristol makes note of how in English Renaissance playhouses the authority over the text/performance was dispersed amongst the people. The narrative was publicly owned and the players ought to be understood as "immediate creators." The collective ownership of a text is potentially a threat because there is no way to exert control over the process (Bristol 120-1).

In modern drama, the idea of collective ownership of a narrative has been usurped by the prominence of the writer. In addition to commenting on the significance of popular performance traditions in his essay "The World is Not Such a Bad Place...," Polish Director Jerzy Afanasjew also raises concern about how the writer has taken complete authority over the word, forcing the actor to be just an actor.

> Literature has devoured the street-fair show, where the actor was also the author. Nowadays the manuscript of one great tragedy reproduced in a hundred thousand copies, translated into all the languages of the world, makes thousands of actors in thousands of theatres experience the same emotions written by one single individual. [...] The actor has become only an ACTOR (266).

Despite the significance of the playwright, theatre practitioners have found ways to create the sense of a collective narrative by incorporating into their plays and performances elements of popular theatrical practice. The clown, by ensuring authority does not remain in the hands of an individual character has a hand in this development. In part, the creation of a collectivity occurs in the particular relationship the clown has with the audience. Because the clown is always in relation to the audience and plays off their reactions, the audience, rather than playing an inert role, is active in the creation of meaning on stage. The clown also spreads authority in the way that s/he undermines the power of particular characters and also draws attention to the performance itself. In August for instance, August undermines the authority of the Director because he disrupts the orderly sequence of the circus and establishes his own performance. By repeatedly uncrowning characters, ideas, or objects of authority, the clown denies the centralization of power.

This particular role of the clown is best exemplified in Fo's Accidental Death of An Anarchist in which the authority of the story is shown to be in the hands of many different characters as well as with the actors, the playwright, and the story as played out in the real world (Wing 141). In this way, Fo recaptures the dispersed authority characteristic of a collective narrative. By repositioning the story as a collective narrative,

Fo subverts the notion of 'the truth' and denies the power of a single authorial voice. The Maniac, the clown character, plays a key role in the creation of the collective narrative. In the role of the Magistrate, the Maniac draws out various versions of the story from the different players and also makes a point of interacting with the audience.

Clown in Performance

The significance of the clown in performance has much to do with the iconic status of the clown character. The theatrical clown is characterized by a dual identity which is formed by his/her role as a performer and a spectator. Further the clown is a distinct character, in that s/he is "equally at home in the world of reality and the world of the imagination" (Welsford xii). The clown is both an established figure in the theatre, but also in the imagination of the spectator beyond a specific literary/dramatic context. The clown "belongs to the bigger, extra-literary context of everyday life" (Bristol 143) and comes with specific expectations. For instance, Kohout's protagonist August is known to an audience as a particular clown figure beyond the context of the play. August might be a character in Kohout's play, but this clown character is also a staple in the circus and therefore transcends the boundaries of the play's text.

In this dual role as spectator and performer, the clown is subject to his/her own rules of performance that differ from those of conventional performers. For instance, in many cases the clown is separate from the action on stage. This enables the clown to comment without impacting the dramatic action. This particular role for the clown is evident in Peter Brook's production of Weiss' Marat/Sade (1967). Brook has the chorus members in the role of clowns. It is apparent these characters are clowns by their clothing and their painted faces. They seem to exist outside of the main action on stage, commenting on it, interacting with it, but not necessarily contributing to the progress of

an event or action within the plot. At first, it seems that the clowns are also inmates in the asylum. But as the play continues, Brook has these clowns interact with the noble audience, Marat, and the inmates. They are visually distinct which heightens their particular status as performers.

As clowns these characters draw a distinct form of attention. They appear ridiculous, yet threatening, but there is also an enjoyment that comes from watching them. It is difficult to take these clowns seriously. When they do perform an action that is potentially serious, it is somehow undermined. For example, when they imitate Marat in his bath writing out his thoughts on revolution, the tragedy of his position is undermined. Similarly, when the clowns sit in the seats of nobility watching the inmates' performance, they draw attention to the status of these noble characters, because of the very fact that the clowns themselves look hopelessly unnoble in their status within the same seats. The convention of the clown allows these clowns to take on alter identities without relinquishing their clown identity.

There are at times corresponding actions between the patients in the institution and the clowns. There is a certain impudence in the actions or attitudes of these clowns. They go about their business as if it was nobody's but their own. They are clowns, but they play the part of whatever role they take on in a hyper way. For instance, in a scene where they are sad, they play up the drama of the sadness. But in the next moment they are laughing at something else. Nothing is ever static for the clown, and somehow when this is translated into performance, it creates a sort of insincerity that is quite sincere.

Another result of the duality of the clown is the evocation of particular kinds of laughter. The clown's recognizable identity leads the audience and the other characters to make certain assumptions. As the fool, the clown will not be accorded the same respect

by other dramatic characters, and is likely to be treated with some sense of indifference because of his/her low status. From the perspective of the audience, the clown suggests a particular convention of performance. For example, the clown is a character who will by chance or smarts find his/her way out of a difficult situation. Similarly, the clown can hit his/her thumb with a hammer repeatedly and somehow not be susceptible to the same standards of pain as the common person. In light of these and other similar conventions, the clown gives the audience permission to laugh without fear or concern of any consequences.

A common condition theories of laughter establish is that laughter will only occur when no harm comes to the subject of laughter unless the subject is of high status (see Bristol 125-139; Bergson; McFadden). The lack of consequences is precisely what distinguishes the actions of the clown. Even if consequences do occur, such as the authority getting angry and even punishing the clown, the clown still somehow manages to escape any serious threat. A characteristic of the clown's actions raised by Wolfgang Iser in his essay "The Art of Failure: The Stifled Laugh In Beckett's Theater," is the way the clown will repeat an action despite repeated failure. Iser argues, "[t]he laughter with which we great the clown's actions is liberating because we perceive the naiveté in which he is trapped" (152). Laughter then creates a sense of superiority in the audience. When the clown fails initially and then repeats the same action, the audience becomes aware the clown will fail again. This laughter is liberating in the sense that it relieves the audience of having to feel for the subject. The audience can laugh freely at the actions of the clown because the clown will not come to any harm.

This particular position of the clown as a performer presents the possibility for a liberating laughter that is political in nature. It has been established that laughter created

by the clown does not require complex mental analysis to occur. The clown's actions then allow for mental energy to be re-directed, in this case to the politics. Benjamin notes this potential for laughter in "The Author as Producer" in the context of Brecht's epic theatre. He writes, "there is no better starting point for thought than laughter; speaking more precisely, spasms of the diaphragm generally offer better chances for thought than spasms of the soul" (101). This comment is perhaps not a complete endorsement for the political potential for laughter, but it does bring attention to the possibility laughter has to release an initial visceral response which in turn leaves room for critical thought.

An additional common argument amongst theories of laughter is that laughter occurs when the subject acts in a manner that deviates from the norm. Or, as Freud argues, when a person expends excessive or inadequate energy in the completion of a task (McFadden 133). This argument suggests that there is a normal way to behave. The clown's relationship to the social world is perceived as distorted because of the assumption that an undistorted perspective exists. When laughter occurs because of the clown's actions, attention is drawn to this difference. Difference is paradoxically both unacceptable and necessary to the official world. The official world is organized on the basis of difference in rank and status and relies on these differences to maintain power. But the official world also expects conformity to its organization. Lack of conformity, or behaviour that is different, is not tolerated. For instance, in Red Noses, the Floties refuse to conform to the Church's authority, which is based on an hierarchy. The Floties are condemned because they are different, but also because they refuse to accept their role within the Church hierarchy that determines them as different from those who make up the Church authority.

As Bristol argues, laughter draws attention to "a structure of differences." This

structure is based upon the vertical distribution of rank and status in which positions of power are established. Power relies on difference in order to renew itself and is weakened when this structure is exposed (Bristol 137-8). The clown is visibly different, whether this difference is signaled in his/her clothes, behaviour, or the red nose. The audience is clearly aware of the clown as different. This is evident in both August and Red Noses. August's clothes, behaviour, and painted face determines him, without a doubt, as clown. Barnes distinguishes his clowns with the iconic red nose. The official order's reliance on difference is made apparent in the juxtaposition of the clown's difference against the official world's seemingly ordered reality.

The concept of difference forms the foundation of the clown's politics. It is both in the clown's status as different and in his/her ability, as a result, to expose differences, that the clown becomes a political character. As both a theatrical and extra-literary character, the clown maintains a particular identity as a carnivalesque figure, that enables him/her to interact with his/her surrounding environment without adhering to established social conventions. This identity is an accepted convention by both the audience and in most instances, by the other non-clown characters in the play. The clown has nothing to lose, because all the clown has is his/her clownish identity. S/he holds no ties to any fixed social order and continually denies any stabilized system. The paradox of the clown comes from the power s/he has because of his/her powerlessness, a power that is realized in the ability the clown has to see beyond the fixed social order. It is in the context of performance that the paradox of the clown's identity are most apparent. Clown is based on performing in the moment, which in turn emphasizes the creation of meaning in the moment of reception and relies heavily on audience reaction. The relationship the clown forms with the audience becomes central to the clown's political performance. The clown

will use the audience to emphasize when s/he deviates from social convention and/or when s/he succeeds in tricking those characters in positions of power.

In Red Noses and August, the clowns are positioned in opposition to a ruling authority and the plays unfold as a power struggle between these two parties. The politics of the clown then, is established in the interrelationship between authority and carnivalesque and the subsequent power struggle that occurs. At the end of both plays, the clowns are punished and killed. This punishment poses a dilemma in the clown(s)' politics. In both plays, the ruling order is not removed, it is in fact, restored. The punishment, however, forms part of the power struggle, in which the freedom the clown asserts is denied and the power of the official order is reasserted. As a consequence of the struggle, the oppressive role of the official order is revealed. Barnes and Kohout each strategically incorporate the clown in a different way, and from a different artistic need. The politics of the clown in both plays however, develop out of the clown(s)' distinct clownish identity, that forces a dialectic perspective, that in turn exposes the differences embedded in the social world.

The Power of the Auguste: Pavel Kohout's August August, August

In August August, August,[5] Czech playwright Pavel Kohout uses the circus and the clown character to comment on the manifestation of power as an oppressive force. This play is a circus performance that allows Kohout to create an allegory for the oppressive political climate in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s. This play is the story of August, a circus clown who wants to parade the Lipizzaner horses, a number reserved exclusively for the Circus Director. When August learns he must become the Director to lead the Lipizzaner horses, he sees no reason why this dream might not become a reality and pursues his goal without hesitation. The Circus Director encourages August, but continues to assert his power and actively tries to prevent the clown from realizing his dream. As the play progresses however, the Director and his obedient Ringmaster become increasingly frustrated as August succeeds in getting closer to his dream and the threat he poses to their authority becomes more apparent. By using the clown, Kohout is able to show how structures of power are immobile and static, despite their claim to progressiveness, a reality reminiscent of his immediate political context. The circus, a place of ultimate possibility, is soon revealed to be a rigid hierarchy, when an innocent clown is killed for daring to think beyond the existing circus (social) order. By thinking outside the fixed hierarchy of the circus, August stakes his political position as a carnivalesque character.

In the first chapter, Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of carnival is used to establish a theoretical basis to understand the clown as a political character. The main argument is that the clown, as carnival's representative, will interact with the official world under the laws of carnival. Therefore, the clown will not adhere to the order of the official world as manifested in such factors as status, language, and other social norms. The result is a clash

[5] The english translation used is the unpublished version by Jack Garfein: New York, 1985.

between the clown and the official order that draws attention to the way the official world imposes an order and hierarchy. The idea that the clown clashes with the offical order is used in the following discussion as the basis for understanding how August functions as a political clown. As a carnivalesque character, August succeeds in exposing and disrupting the power of the two circus authorities, the Ringmaster and the Circus Director.

As an allegory, the politics in August are disguised. It is therefore necessary to peel back the layers and explore the various ways Kohout uses the circus and the clown to create a political meaning. Theatre critic W.B. Worthen notes the way genre will impact the spectators' relationship to the stage (157). This discussion then, emphasizes the significance of the circus in shaping the politics of the play as well as the spectators' relationship to the characters and action on stage. In Circus and Culture, Paul Bouissac provides a semiotic analysis of the circus and draws attention to the various conventions of the circus and how these are communicated to and read by the audience. Bouissac's analysis is used to show how Kohout conforms and deviates from these circus traditions to draw attention to the conflict within the circus between its sense of possibility and the reality of its limitations. Although the circus appears to be an environment in which anything is possible, there is in fact a rigid hierarchy to which the circus performers must conform. Kohout plays with this duality to bring attention to the way those in authority manipulate those beneath them while pretending to help. This false perception the circus creates and the circus authority encourages draws attention to the illusion the circus, or other similar hierarchical structures of power, purport in order to maintain themselves. Here Louis Althusser's arguments on ideology are useful in understanding August's relationship to the circus and his role within the hierarchy. Althusser argues that "ideology is a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real

conditions of existence" (153). August's understanding of his relationship to the circus is imaginary, it is an illusion. Paradoxically, August's belief in the imaginary is what in fact enables him to disrupt the power structures embedded in the circus.

These varied theoretical perspectives offer a range of tools with which to unpack the political clown in this play. Kohout is not making an overt ideological statement, nor is he spouting an official political position. He is however, raising questions about power and how power is distributed and abused and also brings attention to the disguise power can take in its attempt to create an illusion of freedom.

The following discussion begins with a brief look at Pavel Kohout and his position within Czech theatre and politics. Then, to provide some context to the politics and allegory in August, a few of the major events and changes that occurred throughout the 1960s in Czechoslovakia are outlined. The analysis of the play begins with a look at the importance of the circus setting and how Kohout uses it to dramatize the politics of the play. The next section focuses on the lead clown character, August, and emphasizes his role as the traditional auguste circus clown, and how this in turn enables him to expose, disrupt and at times undermine the hierarchy within the circus. The discussion then focuses more specifically on the power struggle between August and the Circus Director, in particular in terms of each character's relationship with the audience. Lastly, to wrap up the discussion, there is a brief look at the play's reception and some questions raised as to the efficacy of the play's politics outside the context of the original production.

Pavel Kohout and Czech Theatre

August August, August was written and produced in 1967, just a year short of the Prague Spring (1968), the famous Czech, liberal period of communist rule. The play premiered May 12, 1967, in Prague and a year later, September 24, 1968, following the

Soviet invasion, was produced again in Prague at the Vinohrady Theatre. The year following, August opened in Vienna with the original mise en scène. The play received its premiere in French in 1971 at Théâtre de la Commune, D'Aubervilliers, France with the mise en scène by french director Gabriel Garran (Auguste 5-6). August proved to be very popular outside of Czechoslovakia, and since its premiere, has been produced across Western Europe (Steele; Trenksy). August received its North American premier in 1973 at Nouvelle Compagnie Théâtrale, Montreal and later in 1986 premiered in english at Théatre de la Jeune Lune, Minneapolis.

Pavel Kohout was one of the most important, and perhaps most controversial figures in Czech drama during the period from 1945 up until the Prague Spring in 1968. His wealth of work includes volumes of poetry, plays, prose, as well as essays and commentaries (Goetz-Stankiewicz 87). Kohout also worked as a director in the theatre and film, and as the editor of a satiric popular journal (Trensky 148). He was also active in the political sphere, and participated in the rebellion by members of the Writers' Congress against the Party during the 1960s. Despite the various shifts in Kohout's work, he consistently sought out various ways to bring political issues to the stage. His early plays, The Good Song (1952) and September Nights (1955), adhere to standards of socialist realism reflective of his early position as an orthodox Communist.

By the 1960s however, Kohout had renounced his earlier position with communism and became an important representative of the Party's most liberal wing (Trensky 148). The subsequent shift in his politics is already evident in two plays from the late 1950s, Good bye Sadness (1957) and Such a Love (1957). Both plays appear after the fall of Stalin and are characteristic of the shift in Czech drama away from socialist realism and towards individual and everyday concerns. With the success of these

four plays, by the late 1950s, Kohout had established himself as a leading Czech playwright.

From 1961-67, Kohout's dramatic work consisted only of adaptations. These plays include Joself Svejk (1963), based on Jaroslav Hasek's novel (1921-3), and War With the Newts (1963), an adaptation of Czech writer Karel Capek's novel of the same name, first published in 1936. The practice of adapting novels to the stage allowed Kohout to explore themes of oppression and power in a time of restricted expression (Goetz-Stankiewicz 97).

After the Soviet invasion, Kohout refused to renounce his reformist position and was subsequently blacklisted in his own country. As a result, Kohout found himself writing plays solely for export which helped establish him as a critically acclaimed writer across Europe and North America (Trenksy 149). His later plays include a trilogy of one acts, Life in a Quiet House which includes War on the Third Floor (1970), Bad Luck under the Roof (1972) and Fire in the Basement (1973). These three Kafkaesque plays all deal with an inexplicable military/police home invasion that interrupts an intimate setting between a couple. His other plays include Roulette (1973) and Poor Murderer (1971), the latter, perhaps his most successful play, was produced on Broadway in 1976.

Once Kohout moved away from the model of socialist realism his work is characterized by a highly theatrical, circus like quality. Kohout experimented with Chekovian and Brechtian techniques and was also influenced by puppet theatre, the circus and silent film (Trensky 149). Goetz-Stankiewicz argues that Kohout developed his plays with a full awareness that the text makes up only one part and that there are a multitude of ways a playwright can reach an audience. His work emphasizes an antirealism, and uses techniques such as visual projections, chorus-like groups of actors,

reportage, song, and several actors playing multiple roles. These various stage effects complement Kohout's text and complete the meaning of the stories (92-99). This combination of stage effect and text is particularly significant in a time of political oppression, and is exemplified in August.

Kohout's work has generally been widely praised by audiences but coldly received by critics. In particular, Kohout has been criticized for the way he supposedly bends to the desires of the audience, following trends in the box office and sacrificing the quality of his art (Trensky 149). Goetz-Stankiewicz however, emphasizes Kohout's strength in blending "the social and human problems of his time with showy, sparkling theatricality" (91).

A Brief Overview of Czech Politics, 1948-68

From the year 1948 the Czech Communist Party followed the Stalinist Soviet model of government, and Czech art and literature were strictly limited to the criteria of socialist realism. By the mid 1960s however, a process of de-Stalinization, the blatant failure of the Party's economic policies, as well as a growing disillusionment among party members, artists, writers, and the general public, set the stage for a movement towards reform (French 212-13). By 1968, the force of the reform movement resulted in the resignation of Party Secretary-General and President of the Republic, Antonín Novotny who, under pressure recommended the liberal communist leader of the Slovak Party, Alexander Dubcek as his successor. The establishment of Dubcek as Party leader furthered the realization of a new communism, dubbed by Dubcek as "socialism with a human face" (Korbel 285). Unfortunately, the Prague Spring was short-lived. Threatened by the impact of this new brand of socialism, Soviet troops invaded Czechoslovakia August 20, 1968, and reinstated centralized Party control.

Despite the tragic ending to Czechoslovakia's "socialism with a human face," the 1960s proved to be a significant period for cultural development. The initial move towards reform occurred in 1963, with the introduction of the New Economic Model, developed by Party intellectual Ota Sik. At the centre of the N.E.W. and the reform movement was the democratizing of the socialist model. Public participation was seen as imperative if any change was to become a reality. This shift in policy resulted in a widespread debate among writers, artists, and intellectuals (French 217). The impact on the cultural sphere was realized in a variety of ways such as: the development of stronger relations with Western European artists, intellectuals, critics, and writers by way of increased travel to and from Czechoslovakia; the reemergence of previously banned Czech writers such as Franz Kafka; increased availability of Western publications including works by John Sartre, Kierkegaard, Camus as well as Ionenesco, Anouilh, and Beckett, and a renaissance in Czech film, literature, and theatre (Burian 94; French 218).

The two main genres of theatre that dominated this period are poetic drama and satire. Both styles emphasize broad philosophical themes and often use allegory or literary/Biblical sources to make reference to contemporary realities (Trensky 22). The poetic dramas use the past to make comment on the present in an "impressionistic [or] flexible realism." The End of Carnival (1963) by Josef Topol (b.1935) and The Heavenly Ascension of Saska Christ (1967) by Frantisek Pavlicek (b. 1923) are examples of this particular style (Burian 107).

The satire was written in a grotesque or absurd style and primarily explored issues of power as well as the role of the victim. Some examples of plays include the work of Václav Havel (b. 1936) such as The Garden Party (1963), The Memorandum (1965), and The Increased Difficulty of Concentration (1968), and other plays such as King Vávra

(1964) by Milan Uhde (b. 1936) and The Castle (1964) by Ivan Klíma (b. 1931) (Burian 102-6). Kohout's work from the 1960s does not fit neatly into either category, but the presence of themes of power, philosophical questions, as well as absurd elements in his plays place him among other Czech writers of this period who were discontented with their government.

August August, August is the story of a circus clown August, who wants more than anything to parade the Lipizzaner Horses, a number reserved for the Director & Star. The Director agrees to August's wish, but to evade August's desire he demands that the clown fulfill several conditions. These conditions involve conforming to the conventions of the social world of the circus, and primarily have to do with acquiring symbols of power and status. They include having a business card, finding a wife and family, and owning a circus.

The sequence of conditions the Director lays out sets up the power struggle that will unfold as August sets out to meet each requirement. With each condition the Director and Ringmaster find new ways to circumvent August's success and keep the clown in his role within the circus hierarchy. However, in spite of the Director and Ringmaster's efforts, August manages to find a wife, have a family, and earn enough money to buy a circus. The play unfolds as a game in which August is falsely lead to believe he, a clown, can rise up in the circus ranks and become the Director & Star. It is through the ordering and the completing of the tasks that the clash between carnival and the official order is realized. In the play two things occur. On the one hand, the clown undermines the circus authority, raises question about the official circus hierarchy, and asserts agency in the development of the circus performance outside established convention. On the other hand, there is a deliberate attempt on the part of the Director and Ringmaster to

manipulate August's fate and sadistically encourage him to fulfill a hopeless dream. The Circus Director and the Ringmaster make August believe he can succeed. As a clown, August takes them on their word and in turn exposes the fictive reality within the fantasy of the circus.

The power dynamics that play out in August are strikingly similar to 1960s Czech politics. The conflict between the reformers and the conservative Party wing was particularly evident between Czech writers, who were organized in the Writers' Union, and the Party leaders. The Party did not embrace the reform movement, but under pressure the leaders were forced to increase freedom and allow for discussion and argument in the public and artistic sphere. However, the Party never rescinded their right to control cultural output. The reformers threatened the current existence of the Party and therefore undermined the leaders' power. The sense was freedom was *given* by the Party, thereby reserving their right to take it away. The paradox of the reforms was that "[c]hange [...] implied increased vigilance" (French 220). The Czech constitution had declared censorship illegal, but the Party succeeded in ensuring control through the use of advised editors, who established a direct relationship between cultural journals and the Party. But by 1967, during the move towards reform, the Party legislated censorship, establishing further control over literary output. The Party was mainly concerned with journalistic and nonfiction work and allowed artists working in the realm of creative literature relative freedom. Although artists still could not make outright statements against the Party, flexible ideas about how art should contribute to the goal of socialism allowed artists to explore forms of expression beyond the model of socialist realism (French 222). In August, Kohout theatricalizes a similar paradoxical game. Those in power offer a freedom over which they continue to exert control. By creating the

appearance or the illusion of freedom, they hope to justify their position while ensuring their maintenance of power.

The Circus

Drama critic W.B. Worthen argues that politics in modern drama occur in the activity of production. Rather than looking at the subject matter or theme of a text, Worthen argues that politics emerge "in the disclosure of the working of ideology in the making of meaning in the theater, in the formation of the audience's experience" (146). In light of the convention of the clown and circus as well as the play's original political context, Worthen's emphasis on how politics emerge in the way meaning is created on stage is relevant to a discussion of August.

When August was written, Czech artists were experiencing relative artistic freedom. Kohout however, would still not have been allowed to make an overt criticism against the Party. Under these particular circumstances, the theatre becomes an important facet for creating political performances given that meaning can be created in the immediate moment of reception. This spontaneous creation of meaning is a central aspect of the clown in performance. In August, the subtlety of the dialogue, the prominence of the clown, as well as the circus setting, provide Kohout with ample extra-literary meaning in which to create a political performance. As critic Trensky notes, "[t]he essence of the play lies more in the improvisational action out of the numbers suggested in the stage directions than in the dramatic text itself" (160). Because the clown presupposes a physically based performance there is ample room for meaning to be created beyond the text. When other outlets for political creative expression are suppressed, the clown is a useful theatrical device. In August, Kohout situates the clown in a traditional context, the circus. The convention of the circus further enables Kohout to create meaning beyond the

surface story and dialogue, and also sets up a particular audience-performer relationship. In August it is necessary to acknowledge the "power of genre to refashion the spectator's relation to the stage" (Worthen 157). Here the circus is the genre that does precisely that.

The circus in August is an allegorical device that sets up the play's political meaning. M.H. Abrams defines allegory as "a narrative, whether in prose or verse, in which the agents and actions, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived by the author to make coherent sense on the "literal," or primary, level of signification, and at the same time to signify a second, correlated order of signification" (5). The dual signification of allegory is apparent in August. The circus story stands on its own as a first order of meaning, but it is clear Kohout creates a second order of meaning that has to do with systems of power. When August was first produced, the audience likely experienced the play simultaneously as a circus performance and as an accurate representation of their reality. There are then, more precisely, three orders of signification, the circus, the allegory, and reality.

Despite its allegorical label, August is first and foremost experienced as a circus performance. There is something quite exciting about the subtlety by which Kohout weaves in the politics. The production of this play demands a balancing act in which the spectacle is not sacrificed for the politics, nor the politics sacrificed for the spectacle. The spectacle is important because it is in the exploitation of circus conventions that Kohout draws the audience into the game played by August and the Director. In his essay "Greek Theatre," Roland Barthes argues that many of the techniques used by the Greeks created a kind of "dialectical realism, in which the theatrical illusion follows an incessant oscillation between an intense symbolism and an immediate reality" (85). In the context of August, the oscillation is between the allegory and reality, or more accurately, between

the circus and the reality to which it refers. Kohout is constantly shifting between the illusion and spectacle of the circus performance and the immediate reality to which this performance is making reference. Each time the audience is caught up in the spectacle of the circus, Kohout reminds the audience of the allegory and the reality to which it refers. It is within this spectacle that Kohout disguises his politics.

To better understand the way Kohout exploits circus convention, it is useful to look at what some of these conventions are. Because these conventions are implicitly known, Kohout is able to play with them in order to draw attention to the paradox of the circus. In his book Circus and Culture Paul Bouissac provides a semiotic analysis of the circus and draws attention to some of its established conventions. He argues that the circus forms its own sign system of which each individual act forms a part. This system in turn operates as distinct from, but in relation to, the relevant social and cultural context, depending on where the circus takes place. Bouissac's argument that the circus sign system is distinct from that of social reality establishes the circus as parallel to carnival. He provides the example of a chair in the circus versus its significance in the social world. In the circus a chair changes meaning depending whether it is used in a clown's act, an acrobatic feat, or an animal trick. But although its meaning shifts with each act, the chair also maintains its meaning as understood within the social world (Bouissac 21). Therefore, the audience is aware of the deviation of meaning that occurs in the circus ring. The circus then, is a temporary world where meaning is distorted distinguishing it from the social world. In the circus animals act as humans, humans act as animals, the body is contorted in ways not part of daily life, and in a way, the circus gives the impression that anything is possible. Like carnival, the circus is a topsy-turvy world in which social norms are temporarily suspended.

But the circus is distinct from carnival in two ways. Firstly, in carnival, there is no distinction between spectators and performers. In the circus however, the carnivalesque world exists separately from the spectators. The audience might be drawn into the performance, but they remain separate, which allows them to bear witness to the actions in the ring. Most significantly, the circus has an established hierarchy that creates divisions between acts and performers. Not everyone can be the Director, the Ringmaster, or the acrobat. There is a fixed vertical distribution of status that compartmentalizes each performer in a particular role. The circus is paradoxical. It is both a place of great freedom and limitation. There is an illusion of possibility which can allegorically be interpreted as an illusion of freedom. The paradox of the circus enables Kohout to draw attention to the way authority creates an illusion of freedom while continuing their powerful exploits. In particular, the paradoxical circus resonates with the reality that the Czech Party's policy of liberalization resulted in stronger surveillance and control mechanisms (French 219-20). The prepackaged, carefully orchestrated performance of the Hardman Circus has much in common with the performance of the Party.

There are various strategies of presentation used in the circus that Kohout appropriates to play with mechanisms of control and power. The performance in the circus ring is an act of communication that is shaped by a variety of effects that impact the audience visually and auditorially. These effects include costume, lighting, the set, music, and vocal introduction or interludes (Bouissac 13-15). These various elements of the circus will impact how the audience receives each respective act. Bouissac uses the example of costume to show how an act of survival such as crossing a tightrope will lead to different interpretations. A performer dressed as a tramp-clown will be considered to have completed the task by chance, whereas a performer in a brightly coloured leotard

will be seen to have a superior talent (19). In the circus, there is a deliberate attempt to control the audience's reception of what occurs in the ring. The circus director plays a particularly important role in this regard. It has traditionally been the role of the director to chose the acts and the order in which they are performed (Bouissac 13). The director then, has the power to control how his/her circus will proceed.

In this play, the political meaning is created in great part by the way Kohout uses these various tools of performance. The visual impact of the characters' costumes for instance, has a central role in informing the audience of the power dynamic between August and the Circus Director. In a semiological analysis, Joseph Melançon argues, "[l]a disposition et les mouvements des personnages constituent en eux-memes un microcosme sans qu'aucune parole ne l'exprime" (22). For example, the position of the Director in the circus space at the beginning of the play establishes his authoritative role (Melançon 22). The stage directions read, "*The Director-Star Hardman stands in the midst of this Hurly-Burly like the axis, around which the world turns*" (1-1). The Director graciously welcomes the audience to his circus, but physically commands his position of power letting both the audience and the circus performers know who is in control. Right in the beginning of the play the text says one thing and the visual says another. Kohout also ensures that upon August's first entrance the audience is immediately made aware of his clownishness. The stage directions read, "*[t]he music stops, EVERYBODY stands still and looks towards the main entrance. And there HE is: in gigantic battered shoes and wide trousers, with a deformed hat, with a thick potato nose, a blood red mouth and two large spots around his eyes*" (1-2). The deliberate identification of both the Director and August is a key part of the play's politics. It sets up August's relationship with the Director and the audience and also sets up the assumptions Kohout wants the audience to make about

these two characters. In this initial introduction of the clown, August establishes himself as a subversive character. The irony is August identifies himself, and therefore denies the circus authority the control of identification.

An additional important circus convention Kohout makes use of is the circus act, or more specifically, the clown act and its significance relative to the other performances. Bouissac identifies four stages that a typical circus act will follow: 1) identification of the hero, 2) qualifying test, 3) glorifying test, and 4) public acknowledgment (25). In looking at the play it is possible to identify a similar, although not identical, pattern. August plays out as an extended clown act that unfolds throughout the circus program. The condition of becoming the Director makes up one act, and each contributing condition make up a series of smaller acts. To ensure the audience becomes familiar with this convention, Kohout sets it up, repeats it, and then eventually deviates from it to set up the politics of the play.

An example from the beginning of the play provides some sense of how this progression unfolds. The identification of the hero occurs with August's first entrance as articulated above. Each subsequent condition, the business card, getting a wife, finding a father in law, having a child, and owning a circus make up a series of qualifying tests that lead to the glorifying test which is as the Director explains: "to reach the level I have reached to become the Director & Star" (1-7). Once the Director establishes that August must become the Director in order to parade the horses, he identifies the first qualifying test.

> DIRECTOR. The first condition is: you have to have a business card (1-7).

The dialogue then proceeds as a typical clown act with the Ringmaster and the Director

trying to explain to August what a business card is, but without much success. August however, does finally produce his version of the business card.

> RINGMASTER. The Director has to have a business card or no one will believe he is the Director.
>
> AUGUST. Yeahyeah. (*He gives the Director his card back*)
>
> DIRECTOR. This is my business card. You have to have your own.
>
> AUGUST. Yeahyeah. (*He pulls out a giant calendar*)
>
> RINGMASTER. What sort of stupid nonsense is this? (*August opens the calendar and triumphantly shows three calendar pages with the capital letters "AUGUST")*
>
> AUGUST. This is the name, this is the professor and this is the lasting name. That's first class! Now I will dress up the eight white Lizzipaner! (*He pulls out a trumpet and blows a blast*).

The addition of the trumpet blast at the end of this particular sequence establishes some closure and alerts the audience to the clown's success and is perhaps even an invitation for applause, a form of public acknowledgment.

With each task August accomplishes however, he begins to deviate from the Director's plan and causes increasing frustration for both the Ringmaster and the Director. As he accomplishes each task, August begins to alter the circus performance, establishing his own routine. For example, although Lulu the doll is killed, as August laments his loss, the doll "*stretches her limbs, she has everything, a head, hands, feet. She looks with surprise at the Ringmaster, jumps on the floor and runs to him*" (1-22). Soon after, August finds a father-in-law by rolling out the carpet for him and succeeds in "taking" Lulu from him for his wife. These actions culminate in the middle of the first act when

"*the band suddenly starts to play the Waltz of the eight white Lipizzaner. The sound of a whistle is heard, and August dances into the ring with a whip in his hand*" (1-34) interrupting the Ringmaster who is about to announce the next act. Although August is scolded by the Director for his actions, the clown continues to pursue his own goals and similar disruption of the circus performance occur again throughout the rest of the play.

The Director does not take these events too seriously at first, but he eventually becomes increasingly uncomfortable with the tricks August keeps pulling out of his hat. August's disruption of the circus is evident at one point when the Ringmaster, obedient to his role within the hierarchy and to the Director, expresses his confusion. He asks the Director: "Excuse me, but up to now I always believed that only perfectly rehearsed numbers may appear on our program" (1-33). In this line, Kohout draws attention to one of the consequences of August's actions; the disruption of the unified circus performance which in turn suggests the presence of dissent. In order for the official world to maintain the appearance of a just and ordered society, there is a need to purport the semblance of unity, a practice of concern to the Czech Communist leaders. Suggestions that there might be conflict within the Party was a threat to its power and authority. To combat any sense of disunity, the Party used advised editors to keep undesirable material out of the press, thereby providing citizens processed information. A similar example occurred at the Writers' Congresses. A typical Congress would begin with a pre-meeting, during which Party members would agree on a Party line for the Congress' agenda (French 251).

The Director wants the circus to continue as if things were going as planned and orders the Ringmaster to continue with the program. The stage directions read, "[the Director] is about to exit, and the Ringmaster has just taken the microphone to announce the next number, when the Band suddenly starts to play the Waltz of the eight white

Lipizzaner. The sound of a whistle is heard, and August dances into the ring with a whip in his hand" (1-34). August's entrance is not expected. There is some ambiguity to his role. On the one hand, his entrance follows a typical circus in which the clown interrupts the action, but is in fact following a previously planned clown act. But there is also the sense that August is creating his own act in the middle of the pre-planned circus performance thereby establishing his own agency. Perhaps both the above statements are in fact correct. When the Director asks August why the band is playing the horses waltz, August confidently declares to the circus band, "I already have filled two full conditions. Band..." The Director retorts, "Band stop! The second isn't completed yet" (1-34). August in fact did not break any rules. He fulfilled the conditions and justly expects to receive his award. The Director has to quickly recover his authority and does so by creating new and more difficult conditions. The Director does not deny August his freedom to move up in the circus, but he does make it very difficult for him.

With the final task, Kohout ensures the convention of the clown act is completely overturned. With each previous condition August is successful against all odds. The audience is lead to believe that August will always triumph or at least succeed in avoiding the wrath from the top of the circus hierarchy. With the last condition, August is re-identified as the hero and completes a kind of qualifying test by dressing as a circus director. But when August sets out to finally show the Lipizzaner horses and earn audience recognition for his feat, the performance takes a turn for the worst. The politics of August and the clown come to a full circle at the end of the play. The tragic final scene ends as follows:

> *One hardly can see the body of the first Tiger racing down the gangway and jumping at August---The drum roll has reached its very fortissimo and*

> *all the lights go out. There is total darkness. But a few seconds later the same brisk march music with which the performance began can now be heard and the lights go on again: there is no cage, no tiger, only the costumes of the Augusts are lying flat on the circus floor* (2-36).

But no attention is paid to the missing clowns. The circus ends as if all is normal, with the Director bidding farewell to the audience: "The Hardman circus says a heartfelt good-bye to you, wishing you luck on your journey home---and--on our common journey into--the--future! (1-36)."

With each condition, the Director with the help of the Ringmaster has tried to prevent August's success through various degrees of deceit. By bringing out the Lulu doll, the Director could control the outcome. By manipulating August into the army, the Ringmaster hoped to distract the clown from his ultimate desire. But despite all their efforts, August always managed to succeed. The convention of clown as well as the way Kohout sets up August's repeated success will lead the audience to expect another trick and August's success over the Director. In this final scene however, the clown does not get out of the dilemma. This time, it is not a circus trick. The only way to prevent August from finding his way out of another situation is to remove his clown identity. In order to continue "on our common journey into the future" the Director had to remove the uncommonness. Kohout speaks to this significant scene in the play with respect to the dilemma of the curtain call. This extensive passage highlights the impact this scene had on the contemporary audience.

> The bow is an indispensable part of the production. It can be its crowning glory or...it can erase the impression of the performance. In *August* it was particularly important. For over two hours we were balancing on the

> narrow path between circus and allegory. If the clowns did not reappear at the end, the play would become distinctly allegorical. If, on the other hand, they took a normal bow, their deaths would appear as a cheap circus trick. [...] When the performance was ended, all other performers took their bows to the tune of hearty march music. During the ninety seconds that elapsed since their last scene in the cage the four clowns had taken off their make-up and put on civilian clothes. When they came into the ring, the applause stopped for a moment. It was as if they had taken the audience's breath away. Then the applause redoubled. Four pale, tired actors' faces formed just as striking a contrast to the motley circus than had the four clown masks previously. There was indeed not a trace of the clowns left but at the same time they had risen. The circus and the allegory were united again (qtd. in Goetz-Stankiewicz 104).

In this last scene, Kohout completely upturns the traditional circus convention. The impact of the clowns' removal is significant on many levels. By removing the clown, taking off the red nose in the context of a performance, Kohout breaks with theatrical and circus convention. In a real circus the clowns would not die. Even if they were put in a cage with tigers, the clowns would find a way out of it. But further, in this particular play the director takes away August's armor, his self, his identity. As one reviewer notes, "[i]n life the owners change the rules and sometimes the players simply disappear. This too happens to August who ultimately becomes [a] nonperson (Steele, "Jeune Lune" 8C). The clown has such a unique and fixed identity, that by removing the clown, Kohout is able to make a strong statement about the power of the ruling authority. But most significantly, this last scene results in the merging of the circus with reality.

Kohout notes, "I enjoy a circus. Because we live in one " (French 167). The antithetical nature of the official world of the circus and its sense of possibility is what creates the tragedy in this play. In August, the circus is set up in a particular light in which sorrows are eradicated. The play begins with the welcoming words of the Director articulating the wishes of those in the circus, "[t]o rid you for a few hours of your troubles; [...] we are prepared to free you of these burdens--no matter what you paid for your tickets. We are the circus! Created by God! For when the Lord commanded the tear to flown, he was terrified by it. And HE created this tent, and smiled and spoke: (everybody) Let there be the circus-ring!" (1-1). This opening is how Kohout sets up the circus as a place of freedom and opportunity. This claim is soon dismantled, as it becomes clear this particular circus does not promote freedom. The circus is presented to the audience as an escape and also as a place where dreams might even come true. But in fact they do not, and even in this apparently ideal world of the circus, dreams are rigidly controlled and eventually crushed as are those who try to make change. Throughout the play, the Director pretends that nothing about his circus is problematic. By the end the audience is made to realize that this is only an illusion. It is through the figure of the clown that Kohout makes this illusion apparent.

Althusser's argument about the significance of illusion in ideology provides one possible means to understand August's relationship to the circus hierarchy. Althusser argues that "ideology is a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (153). Ideology masks the true relationship an individual has to the relations of production. Further, ideology becomes useful in the reproduction of the existing relations of production. Because individuals are "interpellated," that is individuals recognize themselves and their role within an ideology,

they come to believe the order of society to be true (Althusser 162). Authority's continued existence is ensured in part in the way individuals come to consciously accept their subjection to the ruling order. Power is reproduced then, not only in the reproduction of the conditions of production but also in the consciousness of individual subjects. For the official order to be maintained, it relies on a "type of personality defined by and dependent on that order" (Lindley 39). Althusser's argument suggests that the power of the ruling class is masked in ideology. He rejects however, the argument that those in power concoct "Beautiful Lies" in order to maintain their position (153). Ideology for Althusser is more complexly interwoven into the fabric of society in what he refers to as Ideological State Apparatuses. These apparatuses make up part of the private/public sphere and function primarily by ideology. They include various institutions such as schools, churches,and the family, all of which share a subjection the ruling ideology (Althusser 143-4).

For August, Althusser's argument is useful in the emphasis he places on the illusion/allusion of ideology (Althusser 153), which is most apparent in the way August is lead to believe he can become the circus director and in turn parade the Lipizzaner horses. Althusser's argument draws attention to the discrepancy between individuals real relationships to the relations of production and what they in fact believe it to be. In Kohout's allegory, the circus is a version of the state, the Director the ruler, the Ringmaster a leader but subject to the Director, and the other performers, including August, are the citizens. The audience too make up part of the citizens, in that they must subject to the Director's authority in order to participate in the magic of the circus. In his desire to parade the horses, August is pursuing a path of power which is exclusively reserved for the Director. Perhaps the ideology of the circus can be understood as one of

possibility. The Director supposedly supports August's dream and allows him this opportunity under several conditions. But the Director is in effect, retaining power while giving August, and even the audience, the illusion that August's dream might be realized. In order to reproduced the existing relations of productions, and for the ruling authority to maintain power, individuals must support and believe the existing order of things, despite the fact, individuals understanding of this order is an illusion.

Kohout makes a point to emphasize the antinomy between the freedom and restraint that plays out in this particular circus. In turn, he draws attention to how illusion is used to justify and mask hierarchical organizations of power. The circus, like power, can be magical and mystifying. It is not always clear how and why things happen. August chooses to believe in the illusion the Director has set up. By doing so, August in fact demands the Director live up to what he has promised. By expecting the illusion of his upward mobility to be realized, August exposes the reality of the Director's position. The Director cannot deliver what he has promised August.

August the auguste and the Interpretation of Meaning

In this circus story, Kohout uses the convention of the traditional auguste clown,[6] which is Berlin slang for silly or stupid (Towsen 208). The auguste is easily identifiable by his clothes, behaviour, and actions. Although each clown performer will develop a distinctly unique auguste, there are some common characteristics. The auguste is basically the dumb clown. But his/her ignorance is more complex than simple stupidity. In his/her ignorance, the auguste receives and interprets the world around him/her in a way that is unique. The auguste clown "ne connaît mème pas les lois du langage; il parle tout de travers et son monde est un monde à l'envers" (Villemaire 18). To find his/her way in the

[6] Although the Auguste forms part of a large family of stupid clowns, this particular clown is still quite young. The stories of who should be credited with the first Auguste vary. However, no matter who is given credit, the Auguste most likely developed in the circus tradition in the mid nineteenth century and by 1880s, the Auguste was a distinct and recognizable character (Towsen 208-9).

world, the auguste has only "sa faculté d'étonnement, sa bonne humeur, et sa fantaisie qui lui permet d'extirper un téléphone de son pantalon ou des poussins de son chapeau! " (Villemaire 18). The auguste then, is unaware that his/her ignorance is problematic to others. Contrary to common sense, the auguste sees no reason why a person should not find a telephone in his/her pants. The auguste's ignorance is what in fact becomes his/her power. But this ignorance is not an empty ignorance. Rather it is full in the way it enables the clown to see and practice endless possibilities. It is this clown's ignorance that enables him/her to interpret the world according to his/her own personal laws, which Bakhtin might call, the "laws of [his/her] own freedom" (Bakhtin 7). The upside down world of the auguste is a world where established rules of order, hierarchy, language, and meaning no longer hold any weight. In turn, the auguste is a character/figure with great freedom.

His identity as the auguste is what gives August the power to see beyond the circus hierarchy and in turn undermine and demystify its authority. This identity is a disguised form of resistance (Timpane 195) and forms a defensive strategy. August's armor is "I am a clown." When a fool declares him/herself as such, the impact of a sanctioning authority figure making the same declaration loses its negative impact (Timpane 196). The clown is at the bottom of the hierarchy and he/she knows it, the audience knows it, and the authority figure in the play knows it. This complete powerlessness is what in fact gives the clown, paradoxically, great power. As the lowest in the circus hierarchy August has nothing to lose which in turn enables him to pursue his goals with all his energy.

Dario Fo argues that clowns always deal with the same problem, that of hunger, whether it be a hunger for dignity, identity, or power (172). August's desire to parade the

Lipizzaner horses, his hunger for dignity, identity, and power, is what drives the action of the play. Not only does August's powerlessness give him power to follow his desires, but his desire is what makes apparent that which August lacks. His desire suggests an unfulfilled need that can never be satisfied. Kohout uses August to draw attention to this lack, which becomes increasingly apparent as August completes each task. Despite August's successes, rather than coming closer to his goal, he gets closer to his demise. As a result, August's lack of power draws attention to the power of the Director, establishing a clear picture of the distribution and abuse of power in this circus setting.

The impact of August's status as an auguste is most evident in the way he interprets language and follows orders. Language is the medium of communication authority uses to give orders and ensure its power. Bakhtin draws attention to this argument in his carnival theory. He argues that the official world establishes differences of rank and status which determine methods of communication (Bakhtin 10-11). Words separate objects and persons identifying differences and establishing hierarchies of meaning. The meaning of words and acts of communication gain social significance within the context of particular conventions and are determined by the differences established across rank and status. There are particular ways an individual must address a person of authority that as a form of symbolic gesturing ensure their power is reinforced. All these rules form a part of the official order and ensure a smooth application of power. As a carnivalesque character, the clown does not adhere to these particular rules and succeeds in subverting the circus authority. For instance, August does not follow the rules of communication based on social rank, evident in the following example. In the beginning of the second act August enters accompanied by the horses waltz. The Director is displeased August has not followed his orders and confronts the clown.

DIRECTOR. August, did you forget what I told you?

AUGUST. Yes (2-2).

When someone asks the question "did you forget what I told you?" the expectation is the person will say no and offer an excuse or explanation as to why he or she was acting in a way they were not supposed to. The suggestion is that a person would not want to let the authority figure know they forgot, or that they would never think of forgetting an order. August on the other hand says what is true. Yes, he did forget.

August misinterprets language in a similar fashion. Bristol argues that the distinct way the clown interprets language is related to the fact the clown knows both the wrong and right side of language. The wrong side of language "permits things to be treated as if they were only names, and vice versa." As a result the "socially inscribed rationality" of language is exposed and the meaning of words are treated arbitrarily depending on the particular circumstances (141). As an auguste, August only knows the wrong side of language. A typical example occurs when the Director shows August his business card. Since August can not read the card because he is "far-sighted" the Ringmaster does it for him, "it says: Alfred--Hardman--Director & Star."

AUGUST. (*pointing delightedly at the Director*) That's him!

RINGMASTER. Yes, that is the Director & Star

AUGUST. I know him! But who are the other two?

RINGMASTER. Which other two?

AUGUST. Alfred and Hardman? (1-8).

August humourously draws attention to the formality and convention of names that establish status and identity. He further debases the authority of names by naming himself August August, August, which literally means clown clown, clown. In his

attempts at conforming to convention in order to parade the horses, August plays up the performativity of these social norms. He plays the role the Director demands of him. It remains apparent that August is playing a role because he never loses his identity as clown. Even when he dresses as a circus director, it is a clown version of circus director. Throughout the play, August inhabits different masks that are used to establish status and power, thereby making apparent the performance of power and authority.

As a result of these deviations from convention, communication between August and the circus authority is problematic. August confounds the lines of communication primarily in his literal treatment of orders and language, evident in the above examples. It is by means of literalization that August succeeds in negating the power and authority of the circus hierarchy. The impact of literalization as the combined effect of the misuse of language and communication is evident in the scene when the Ringmaster has August enlist in the army. The Ringmaster explains that if August sees a suspicious person he should, "call out Halt! Password!" and if he does not give the password August should shoot. The scene continues as follows:

> RINGMASTER. Understood?
>
> AUGUST. Yeahyeah! Halt, password! (*He shoots, the Ringmaster's helmet blows off*)
>
> RINGMASTER. What are you doing?
>
> AUGUST. I shoot you dumb ass. Halt, password! (*He shoots again, the Ringmaster's shoulder straps blow off*)
>
> RINGMASTER. Help! Help!
>
> AUGUST. Halt, transport! (*he shoots again. The Ringmaster's trousers fall down. The Director enters the ring. He gives the band a sign for a*

trumpet blast. August bows so the he can easily be disarmed) (2-11-12).

August has once again prevented the authority of the circus from defeating him and has also succeeded in making the Ringmaster look foolish, in particular because "it was only a toy pistol" (2-12). August takes the order as spoken and as a result makes the Ringmaster appear foolish. It is August's lack of understanding that gives him the power to undermine the authority of the Director and Ringmaster. August disrupts the Ringmaster's order making himself the one with the power, even if momentarily. In this situation it is the literal obeying of an order that gives the clown power. His success derives from his inadequacy and foolishness. Because August is so gullible, the Ringmaster expected to be able to trick him into joining the army. And the Ringmaster was right, he did trick him. But the exchange takes a turn when August's gullibility becomes the downfall of the Ringmaster.

The consequences of this clown language are multiple. In one sense, a clown's interpretation of language develops a circular form of communication that prevents any static form of meaning. The meaning of the exchange is constantly changing. There is a disruption of speech patterns that have been ingrained in the conventions of the social world. Further, this particular language delays the process of giving an order as well as its completion. At times, such as when August joins the army, he sabotages the Ringmaster and the Director's plan. August makes it difficult for the Director or Ringmaster to get him to do something, in many cases simply because of the way he interprets meaning from words.

Czech writer Karl Kosik's comments on Jaroslav Hasek's comic hero Svejk,[7] a

[7] Svejk is the comic hero of Hasek's novel The Good Soldier Schweik published in 1921-3. Schweik is an anti-hero, who joins the German army and submits completely to their authority. But his clownesque character allowed him to undermine the army's authority and control. He represented the underdog of modern industrial society a Czech "little man." This book and character had a big impact on Czech self-identity and consciousness (French 5). This book was adapted for the stage by Piscator and Brecht (1928), Brecht (1943) and Kohout (1963).

character Kohout also adapted for the stage, shed some light on the significance of August's practice of literalization.

> If Schweik appears one minute as an idiot and the next as cunning, one minute as a servant and the next as a rebel, etc., though he always stays what he really is, then his indefinable and changing aspects arise from the fact that he forms part of a system that is inverted and inverting, a system based on the general proposition that people pretend to be something other than they really are, a system whose central characters are the swindler and the controller, a system which contains as an organizing principle *mystification*... whoever takes things seriously and literally, uncovers the absurdity of the system, and by his action himself becomes absurd (qtd. in French 178-9).

This comment draws attention to the impact literalization has on a system of power. At times, in August, it appears that August is the one who is being tricked and at other times it appears that August is the one doing the tricking. But as the action unfolds, it becomes more and more apparent that August is simply doing as asked. The circus is organized on a principle of mystification and it is August, who, taking everything around him "seriously and literally, uncovers the absurdity of the system." Systems of power rely on some form of illusion to justify their continued existence. This illusion demands conformity to its governing rules. To openly question or seek an explanation for the reasons behind the system can in turn become quite threatening. When a character such as the clown innocently asks a simple question it might appear s/he is cunningly trying to outwit the superior character. There is ambiguity in this particular instance. Not only does this ambiguity create the potential for infinite possibilities (see Timpane), but it also

temporarily dispels the illusion. The following scene between the Ringmaster and August is indicative of such a situation. August has just told the Ringmaster he cannot read.

> RINGMASTER. You can't read? So how are you going to become the Director?
>
> AUGUST. (*full of admiration*) And you can read, Mr. Ringmaster?
>
> RINGMASTER. Of course!
>
> AUGUST. Then why aren't you the Director-Star?
>
> RINGMASTER. Because I am not an idiot!
>
> AUGUST. And the Director is?
>
> RINGMASTER. Of course not! You are the idiot!
>
> AUGUST. And why aren't you the Director then?
>
> RINGMASTER. Because I am the Ringmaster and I know---contrary to a stupid August---that I can never become the Director-Star.
>
> AUGUST. How come that it's possible for a dumb August to become the Director-Star while a Ringmaster never can?
>
> RINGMASTER. If you don't stop with all these stupid questions, I won't read the letter and it'll be finished with the woman (1-13).

August is not necessarily smarter than the Ringmaster, but he asks questions that the Ringmaster would not think to ask or have an answer to. Why can August not become the Director? There is no real reason except that the hierarchy of the circus is fixed. August's persistence to find out why the Ringmaster is not the Director not only exposes the truth of the matter, but also causes increasing frustration for the Ringmaster making him lose his cool and appear vulnerable. In this scene August destabilizes the organized circus structure by asking a question for which the answer seems obvious to others but not to

August. When the Ringmaster has no answer, it opens up the possibility that August too could be the Director.

August undermines the circus authority by following its own rules. August is what Schechter calls, "the clown who says yes" (Durov's Pig 58). The clown's literal treatment of orders and language results in the circus being undermined by their own game. The ambiguity of August's ignorance perhaps does not require a resolution. It might be that August's ignorance is a selective one. He might not understand what wife or a business card is, but he does understand that in order to parade the horses he needs to do what the Director asks of him. It is in the way August follows the Director's orders that the clown exposes the truth about the Director's intentions.

Not only does August play by the rules of the circus authority, but he also uses their ammunition. For instance, the Director and Ringmaster often use magic to manipulate August's actions. But August too finds magic useful to get what he wants. In the first act, the clown cracks his own horse whip out of thin air. In the second act August sells his imagination to the Ringmaster in the form of an egg for imaginary money. The Ringmaster believes he has tricked August, but in fact, it is August who has double crossed the Ringmaster. As a result of this exchange August earns enough money to buy his own circus. By playing the game, August in fact trips up the circus authority.

Power Struggle Between Clown and Authority

Throughout August there is a struggle for power going on between the clown and the Director, a struggle which Kohout uses to make apparent the abuse of power. The dichotomy between these two characters is central to the politics of this play. In a review of the 1986 Minneapolis production by Theatre de la Jeune Lune, Mike Steele indirectly raises this point when he praises the actor playing August, noting that he "is a marvel and

is doubly strong because Epp [the director] is such a wonderful adversary, such an overstuffed balloon of pomposity" (8C). The contrast between the clown and the Director makes the audience aware of both August's lack of and the Director's wealth of power. Part of this struggle has to do with who has control over the circus performance and in turn with whom the audience's sympathies lie. In the circus, the way the audience receives each act is in part influenced by the order the acts occur as well as the way the each act is introduced (Bouissac 13). As the leader and as the master of ceremonies, the Director and Ringmaster respectively play a central role in guiding the audience's circus experience. In August there is a clear sense these two characters are working to control August's fate as well as how the audience receives the clown's performance. The Director seems to be playing a joke on August and is taking the audience along for the ride.

There is a dualism to this play's audience that corresponds to the allegory of the play. The audience is at the same time both spectators to a circus performance and spectators to Kohout's play. Additionally, there is an audience within the play made up of the other circus performers, who witness August's successes, failures, and ultimately his death. To consider the circus as an allegorical representation of the government and/or the state, then, as the leader of this state, the Director requires the audience's and other performers' (citizens') trust and their subjection to his authority. As the director of a circus, the Director needs his performer's to submit to his control and the audience to submit to the magic of the circus. Once again, circus and reality merge. To legitimate his authority the Director needs to show the audience that he has control over the circus and will deal with any deviations from his plan.

Throughout the play, the Director and the Ringmaster play up to the audience as they try to prevent August from achieving his goal. The relationship the Director

establishes with the audience occurs through the repeated use of direct address during which he welcomes the audience into the circus experience. Throughout the play/circus the points where the Director reestablishes a connection with the audience occur either while August is about to be tricked, or after August has succeeded in not being tricked. The Director then, addresses the audience to either bring them along in ridiculing August, or as an attempt to reassert his authority by creating a sense that August's tricks are expected and are indeed part of the performance. For example, as August leaves the ring to prepare to meet his new lady, the Director says "Vanish!" and August disappears. Following this feat of magic, "[t]he Director-Star bows and thanks the audience for the applause" (1-15). A line later the Director explains to the Ringmaster, "[August] has to meet the lady right here. I want our audience to get something out of it as well" (1-15). These actions both within and without the allegory make up part of a lesson the Director is teaching the audience. August becomes an example the Director can use to reassert his authority and display it to the audience. Soon after, the Director helps August with his first task by providing a doll as his wife.

> RINGMASTER. Is there a lady in the house who could see herself on a hot date with August?
>
> DIRECTOR. I just happen to have someone here who wouldn't mind. (*He snips his fingers and conjures up a lifesized doll. She is dressed like a female clown, with a clown mask, red hair, and a small red umbrella. The Attendants sit her on chair*) (1-15).

With this action, the Director further establishes his relationship with the audience as they too are aware that August is being tricked. The Director shares a secret with the audience and thereby makes them complicit in the clown's demise. Kohout uses the

Director's direct address to play with how authority and control is used in the theatre. The Director wants the audience to respond in a particular way and attempts to manipulate their reception of August. Again, Kohout draws attention to the way the Party, or those in power, work to manipulate the public's response.

However, each time the Director and the Ringmaster attempt to exert complete control over August, he manages to undermine their authority. Although the Director works hard to maintain a relationship with the audience, it is August who ends up stealing the show. The conventions of the auguste set up this particular relationship. As an auguste, August will give the audience a feeling of superiority as well as a feeling of liberation. For instance, in this play, the audience knows that the Lulu doll is just a doll. The audience is familiar with the conventions and rules of the social order and will in turn understand when from them the clown distorts or deviates. But at the same time, and more significantly, there is a sense of liberation on the part of the audience, not only in laughter, but in the possibilities the auguste creates. When everything goes wrong for the clown, s/he still persists as if s/he were successful (Iser 152). The auguste is ever so hopeful and denies the existence of failure. In this play, August is always prepared to believe one hundred percent in the realization of his dream.

The connection the audience will likely have with August is evident in some of reviews. Reviewer Steele writes, "[w]e wince when he crashes to earth but celebrate when he bounces up, shakes off his dignity, revs up his imagination and again prepares to pit his free spirit against the thuggish banality of the bosses" (8C). August is the underdog and his irrepressible sense of freedom is attractive to an audience. August succeeds where he was not expected to and in spite of the ways the Director and the Ringmaster try and circumvent his success. Along the way, August also manages to make the Ringmaster and

at times the Director look like the fools. In using the convention of the auguste, Kohout encourages the audience to sympathize with August, despite the Director's attempts to control the performance.

As part of the performance component of the clown, his/her relationship with the audience is key. This is a basic part of clowning. In this play, August acts as if he is seeking the Director's approval so that he may earn the right to parade the horses. In the context of a clown performance, this approval would also be sought from the audience. August is playing the game the Director has created for him. Therefore he would likely seek acknowledgment from the audience when he succeeds as for example when he cracks himself a whip, or when he comes onto the stage with the phonograph playing the horses waltz. August's nonverbal communication with the audience would say something like, "See, I did what I was told, now I should get what I've asked for. Let's celebrate!"

August's relationship with the audience, despite the control the Director attempts to exert, furthers the way Kohout juxtaposes the official world against carnival. Although the audience is aware the Director is setting the clown up, they are also lead to believe August will succeed and they want him to succeed. Kohout ensures August repeatedly finds his way out of a dilemma and is successful in the completion of his tasks. He allows the audience to enjoy August's consistency in outsmarting the Director and Ringmaster. They are partially subject to the illusion the Director has set up and in their belief the audience denies the true power of the circus authority.

The relationship between the clown(s) and the audience is imperative in order to set up the impact of the last scene. A review from a 1973 Montreal production comments on this disparity between this particular August and the audience: "He lacks the bittersweet quality you find in classic clowns. You admire him, but you do not fall in love

with him, nor do you want to reach out and help him." As a result, "the final scene does not come as a sudden interjection of reality into a fantasy world" (Siskind, Gazette). Herein lies another example of the fine balance Kohout has created between circus, allegory, and reality. The spectacle is necessary to draw the audience into the world of the circus in order to ensure the impact of when this world is shattered. Although at times it may appear that the Director is helping August, he does so only in such a way that he can also destroy him. Goetz-Stankiewicz notes the way the circus heads do not outright deny August's dream but punish him when he takes it too far, would have been particularly resonant for Czech audiences (101). This false sense of encouragement figures into the way authority attempts to prove its validity. The dream or the desire is somewhat acceptable, because it can be controlled. The problem is the realization of the dream. As the Director explains to August, "A dream should remain a dream August. Otherwise you kill it. Do you understand that?"[8] Once the dream is realized, the Director no longer has complete control. He must therefore contain the problem by ridding his circus of the clown who dares to think beyond the established order.

Terry Eagleton argues that carnival is "a kind of fiction: a temporary retextualizing of the social formation that exposes its 'fictive' foundations" (149). The circus creates the illusion of freedom, which is in fact not the reality of its hierarchical structure. The Director furthers this illusion by encouraging August to believe he can be more than just a clown. But because August agrees to believe this, and expects the Director to live up to his end of the bargain, the fiction of circus is exposed. August does what he is told and should therefore, according to the ideology of the circus (state), get what he was promised. As a carnivalesque character, Augusts succeeds in "retextualizing the social

[8] Goetz-Stankiewicz notes this line makes reference to the poem "Ballad on Dreams" by the idealist socialist, Czech poet Jirí Wolker (1900-24), whom the Director is paraphrasing (286).

formation" and in turn exposes its "fictive foundations."

Reception and Performance

There is a risk with a play such as August that it will be interpreted or received as a play that lacks substance. August is an allegory for the Czech political climate in the 1960s, and would have been immediately relevant to Czech audiences in the context of the original production. But August has been produced across Europe as well as in North America, in which the political contexts are all unique. This play obviously speaks to theatre practitioners and audiences on another level. Kohout has foremost written a play about power and issues of power exist in all political contexts. In addition, the physical and improvisatory characteristic of August is attractive to theatre companies, a point Trensky argues is the primary reason for the play's success in the West (Trensky 160). Given the specificity of Kohout's source for the play's politics, there is some question as to the play's reception and success as political in other contexts.

In all dramatic productions, the audience plays an important role in completing the meaning produced on stage. With a play such as August however, the role of the audience is doubly significant. Without a doubt, a 1967 Czech audience will read a production of August much differently than a 1986 American audience. It is necessary then, for the production to include clues to make the audience aware of the underlying politics in this circus performance. Roland Laroche who directed the Montreal production at Nouvelle Compagnie Théâtrale in 1973 seemed to have in theory a sense of what was required for the dramatization of this play's politics. He notes the following as the guiding spirit of his production: "[August] s'agit d'une comédie, mais qui dépasse beaucoup le simple divertissement. Il suffit de penser à l'analogie constante qu'établit l'auteur entre le cirque et la vie, de même qu'au rapport entre l'exploitant et l'exploité, qui est un thème

fondamental de la pièce, pour voir qu'*Auguste* est un miroir et un reflet de la société" (August 26).

According to Jacob Siskind of The Montreal Gazette however, the NCT production did not succeed in creating this delicate balance between the circus and life. He writes, "the entire production is amusing and entertaining--in fact is quite nice, which is surely not what the author intended." Despite a standing ovation by the audience, Siskind notes, "it was the circus show they were applauding, not Kohout" (A3). Siskind suggests Laroche ended up sacrificing the politics for the spectacle. The other side of this argument might find fault with the audience, or Siskind, rather than the production. In the original production, the audience would not only read beyond the circus story, but they would also appreciate the fact that Kohout's only means of making any political statement would be in this disguised form. If this sense of urgency is no longer applicable, can the play still maintain its political edge?

In her production at Théatre de la Jeune Lune, Minneapolis in 1986, Barbra Berlovitz attempted to get around this particular dilemma. She explains in a newspaper interview the driving ideas behind the production: "we aren't making it specifically Czech. August himself won't be a traditional August clown, but a somewhat modernized version. We aren't interested in showing just how Czechs live; it's larger than that. It's also how Americans live, about our inability to see things and recognize dangers" (Steele, "Czech nonperson" 2C). However, in a personal telephone interview this past year, Berlovitz pointed out their audience likely considered the politics of this play in the context of Eastern Europe, rather than in light of their own immediate world.

The subtlety of August's politics is both a strength and weakness of this play. The subtlety allows for the play to remain relevant beyond its initial political context. It

can however, also lead to productions that misread or ignore the second order of meaning Kohout has written along with the circus story. One interpretation is suggested by Rufus, an actor who played August in the 1971 Paris production. He writes that the play is about how "un artiste perd sa fonction d'artiste quand on le met en carte" (Heyligers 106). In another interpretation, theatre critic Paul Trensky argues that the clown in this play is "a metaphor for perennially frustrated and humiliated humanity" (160). Interpretations such as these are of course valid and the play can be produced in such a way that emphasizes these particular ideas. However, these interpretations downplay the politics of power that Kohout has subtlety weaved into the circus story. When the play becomes about the struggle of humanity, it ignores the divisions that exist between humans which are largely responsible for creating the uneven distribution of power. Beyond the original context, the politics of this play risk becoming generalized.

The challenge for a contemporary director is to find a way of signaling to the audience the second order of meaning behind the surface image of the circus. The director and actors would have to decide to what exactly this second order of meaning would refer. The stability, rights and privileges that come with living in a social democratic state often results in an inertia that prevents a full awareness of the immediate political issues and concerns. The oppression that might be experienced by a middle class Canadian or American, would likely be more subtle and not as direct. Therefore, the political undertone in August might need to be more directly articulated. The added complexity of staging August in a democratic state does not suggest that the play should not be performed. The flexibility of the allegorical style provides an opportunity to tap into immediately relevant issues of power and control. The circus and the clown enabled Kohout to disguise his politics, but they also provide respectively, an ideal setting and

character with which to bring politics to the stage.

The play August August, August shows numerous ways in which the clown can be created as a political character. In this play, the politics emerge out of the power struggle between August and the Director. August does as the Director asks, and in doing so, he succeeds in exposing the circus hierarchy and its conventions as just a game. But it is not the clown alone that forms the politics, but rather the relationship between the clown and an official order. Although the Director orchestrates August's failure, he does not triumph without difficulty. Throughout the play August does his share of exposing and ridiculing authority as well as undermining its power. The death of August simply heightens the clown's politics. The Director won this struggle, but August dared to dream and refused to accept the circus' (the state's) authority as all powerful. He dared to see the circus in a different form, that did not conform to the Director's plan or desires. In August's endless pursuit of his desire to parade the Lipizzaner horses, he holds the Director accountable for promises made. As a result, August's selective ignorance of the circus reality exposes the illusion of freedom and possibility the Director creates in his circus performance.

The Clown's Philosophy: Peter Barnes' Red Noses

In Red Noses Peter Barnes[9] uses the clown as part of a discourse on the potential and limitation for laughter and comedy to be a revolutionary force. Red Noses is set in thirteenth century France during the plague and tells the story of Flote the priest who, finding laughter in God, proceeds to create a clown troupe and spread his new-found knowledge. Barnes uses Flote's journey from priest to clown, and the Floties' performances to develop and articulate his argument. The play is meta-theatrical and consists of various interruptions and alienation techniques drawn from such diverse sources as Jacobean drama, music-hall, and American musicals.

In "The Priest and the Jester," Polish philosopher and marxist critic Leszek Kolakowski engages in an analysis of how philosophy comes to know, understand and make sense of the world. As part of his argument, Kolakowski critically analyzes some of the central trends in modern, secular philosophical practice and draws attention to the problem of what he calls immobility in philosophical thought. He notes the emphasis in philosophy on questioning established systems of thought, but argues that these questions simply instill new systems. Kolakowski concludes his discussion by arguing that there are two opposing philosophies, one that reinforces absolutes and one that questions them. Kolakowski defines this opposition as that between the philosophy of the priest and the philosophy of the jester. He argues that, "in almost every epoch the philosophy of the priest and the philosophy of the jester are the two most general forms of intellectual culture[...]The priest is the guardian of the absolute" and the jester "moves in good society without belonging to it, and treats it with impertinence" (53). This opposition that Kolakowksi establishes shares a similarity with Bakhtin's concept of carnival and the official world and also corresponds to the various conflicting ideas that

[9] Peter Barnes passed away July 1, 2004. See Billington.

Barnes dramatizes in Red Noses.

Barnes believes that "[l]aughter is dangerous" and argues that "[t]hings can't be all that bad if we can still laugh" (Barnes, "Liberating Laughter" 15). In this play, he problematizes laughter and comedic political performance but also celebrates the Floties and their clown philosophy. To make this problem apparent, Barnes creates a series of oppositions which include the divergence of laughter, religious philosophy, and movements for change, characters with power and without, and a time of chaos versus a time of order. In these oppositions Barnes draws attention to the contradictions in the social world and in theatrical conventions. For Barnes, the clown is both the iconic representation of the comedian/performer and the spirit of a particular philosophy that undermines the authority of the Church as well as a unified and ordered society. The presence of the clown is evident in both Barnes' construction of the play and the characters who make up the Floties. In Red Noses, the clash between carnival and official world plays out between the Floties and the Church authority. Although the Floties succeed in undermining and exposing the Church's authority, they ultimately fail in their quest for change. Posing a threat to the power of the Church, the Floties are condemned and killed, an act that reinforces both the Floties' subversion and the Church's power. These two categories that Kolakowski establishes provide a means with which to understand how Barnes uses the clown as a subversive character. Kolakowski offers an opportunity to see clown as a philosophical practice which in turn supports the complexity of Barnes' clowns as well as the obstacles and limitations of their subversion.

In the following discussion, Kolakowski's categories of the priest and the jester provide a means by which to understand how Barnes uses the clown as a political character. After providing some background to Barnes and his work, the discussion begins

by establishing a connection between Red Noses and the concept of carnival as articulated in the first chapter. Kolakowski's concept of the philosophy of the jester is then used to look at how Barnes and the Floties are clowns, who by means of impertinence, a contradictory style and actions, as well as laughter are subversive of the status quo. To further support this discussion, Michael Bristol's arguments in Carnival and Theater on the subversive potential of laughter as well Terry Eagleton's analysis of Brechtian humour in Walter Benjamin are also included. Lastly, the discussion looks at the presence of the philosophy of the priest in this play as is evident in the obstacles and limitations the Floties face that Barnes uses to question the potential for comedy and laughter to be subversive.

Barnes and the Politics of Comedy

Peter Barnes, a leading British playwright, although unique in his writing and style, forms part of a trend in British drama to use comedy in the dramatization of politics. Other such playwrights who have explored the power of laughter and comedy include Peter Nichols, Caryl Churchill, and Trevor Griffiths. Barnes established himself as a controversial playwright and since the success of his first major play The Ruling Class (1968) has struggled to have his work produced. Critics are divided on their opinion of Barnes. He has been celebrated as a key player in the development of British theatre but also criticized for his vulgarity and over the top theatricality (Dukore, Theatre of Barnes 4). Despite mixed reviews, Barnes has left, and continues to leave a mark on British theatre. His work spans several decades and includes numerous plays and adaptations for the stage, radio and television. His plays include Sclerosis (1965), Leonardo's Last Supper (1969), Noonday Demons (1969), The Bewitched (1974), Laughter! (1978), Red Noses (1985) and Sunsets and Glories (1990). Barnes completed Red Noses in 1978, but

the play did not premiere until 1985 at the Royal Shakespeare Company under the direction of Terry Hands. When Hands decided to produce the play, Barnes participated in the rehearsal process and the play changed considerably from the previously unpublished version "Red Noses, Black Death." In fact, the length of the play has required that cuts be made for the purposes of performance, making each production slightly different (Dukore, "The Author's Play" 160). Red Noses has not been widely produced, but after its premiere the play was performed in various cities in both North America and Europe.

Barnes has a fondness and extensive knowledge of Jacobean drama. In particular, Barnes has a fascination and respect for Ben Jonson. This fascination with the Jacobeans has lead Barnes to edit several plays for contemporary productions. These works include Jonson's The Alchemist (1970, National Theatre), Volpone (1976, not yet produced), Bartholomew's Fair (1978, Roundhouse), and The Silent Woman (1979, not yet produced) (Dukore 9). Barnes has also adapted several other Jacobean plays as well as the work of Bertolt Brecht and Frank Wedekind. For example, Antonio, a combination of Marston's Antonio and Mellida and Antonio's Revenge was produced for the radio in 1977, and the stage in 1979. In 1970 Barnes adapted Wedekind's Earth Spirit and Pandora's Box under the title of Lulu for a single evening performance. Other adaptations include Eastward Ho! (1973) originally written by Jonson, Chapman, and Marston and Jonson's The Devil is an Ass (1977).

In the late 1980s Barnes began to write for television. BBC2 screened Revolutionary Witness (1988) which consists of four different character monologues about the French Revolution. Other works produced for television include Spirit of the Man (1989), Nobody Here But Us Chickens (1989), and Bye Bye Columbus (1992)

(Dukore, Theatre of Barnes 9).

In his plays Barnes explores issues of class structure, religion, and theatrical convention. In all of his plays Barnes uses the convention of comedy to explore themes of power, exposing the ways those who make up the Establishment abuse and exploit the ruled. Another major motif in his work, is meta-theatricality. Barnes makes a point to play with theatrical convention and draws attention to the process of making theatre. He does write in hopes of changing the world, even if it is on a miniscule scale. He argues that change occurs at the speed of a glacier's movements, and "the artist's job is to clear away some of the stones that hinder the advance of the glacier" (qtd. in Dukore, Theatre of Barnes 62). Beyond the specific political issues of class structure that dominate his work, a running theme is what Clive Barker articulates as a combination of "the social and the metaphysical" (Barnes, On Class 7). But Barnes does more than just combine these two themes. In his plays he attempts to reconcile, or at least make sense of the contradictions between the abstract and the practice of everyday life.

Barnes' interest in metaphysics is drawn from a fascination with Christianity as a winning ideology: "it's interesting to dissect winners. You wonder why: how come they won? How come Christianity started out the religion of the oppressed, and became the religion of the oppressors? That is extraordinary " (On Class 8). Connected with his interest in Christianity's dominance, Barnes is concerned with the comfort people have in being dominated as well as in having an authority maintain control and order. For Barnes, this position establishes a resistance to change. He argues that "[p]eople want security at any price. They don't want to choose. They don't want to be given the chance to choose how to conduct their lives. Most people prefer the security of being told" (On Class 8). But the prevalence of Christianity in his plays goes beyond a matter of religion.

For Barnes, religion is about questions, such as why are we here? what is our purpose? and these are questions that are of interest to him. Religion for Barnes also has to do with belief. "I have always been worrying about what people believe," Barnes explains, "how they believe and what is belief" (On Class 7).

Dukore argues that Red Noses is a culmination of themes Barnes explores in his earlier works, but with an added optimism. There are rulers who retain power at the expense of the ruled, the marketing of culture for the masses, diabolical religion, and a preference for authority over the responsibility of freedom (Dukore Theatre of Barnes 38). The play is set in thirteenth century France, a time when the plague had disrupted the established social order ruled by the authority of the Church. Father Flote is a young idealistic priest who wants to find a role for himself amidst the chaos of the Black Death. Taking a sign from God, Flote is convinced his role is to be a clown and liberate the dying victims with laughter. "I hear you loud, Lord, in the sound of their laughter," Flote says, "God wants peacocks not ravens, bright stars not sad comets, red noses, not black death. He wants joy" (8). Joined by the jester Sonnerie who communicates using the sound of bells, Flote seeks the approval of Archbishop Monselet. Flote's plan is sanctioned by the Archbishop but he sends Father Toulon along to keep an eye on the clowns, and also advises Flote to ask for permission from Pope Clement IV. With the Archbishop's approval, Sonnerie, Flote, and Toulon proceed to audition performers and prepare a first performance as the Floties. The first play is "Everyman" and mocks Death to the great amusement of the audience. Having achieved success, the Floties separate and travel around the countryside bringing joy and laughter to all. Two other groups however, also want change. The Flagellants advocate salvation through penance and the Black Ravens spread the plague to the wealthy in hopes of starting a new social order. Each group

offers a different ideology for change and in the first act all are in competition with the other.

Soon after the second act begins, the plague ends and the suspended hierarchy is restored. The Black Ravens and the Flagellants are condemned to death and the Floties are commanded to adhere to the wishes of the Pope. At first, Flote submits to save his troupe, but the clowns' second performance, "Christ and Kings" fails to meet the Pope's standards. This time Flote cannot save his fellow clowns. He admits defeat and dances his way to execution.

As a politically conscious playwright whose writes comedy, Barnes finds it necessary to explore the idea of comedy in relation to its political implications. Although it seems an appropriate medium for the ideas he wants to get across, there is also the issue as to how comedy can potentially become a distraction. In Red Noses Barnes brings these questions to the stage in a comedy about comedy. For Barnes, Red Noses "dramatizes a situation in which people use laughter. Does it help to alleviate the suffering that goes on around them, or does it make it worse?" Developing this question further, Barnes asks, "[c]an we ever get laughter from comedy which doesn't accept the miseries of life but actually helps change them? Without laughter, the world will probably be grey. The laughter we have now helps perpetuate the status quo. Laughter linked with revolution might be the best of both worlds" (qtd. in Dukore, Theatre of Barnes 39). Barnes is in a sense dramatizing Bakhtinian theory, questioning and exploring the possibility for laughter to be revolutionary. In writing this play, Barnes is putting the convention of comedy up for critical analysis. He is looking not only at comedy and its impact on the world, but comedy and laughter as a philosophical outlook. Will laughing at tragedy distract or result in change?

In Red Noses the theme of carnival plays out in a grotesque form as the plague. It is striking that Barnes creates possibilities for change at a time of incredible chaos and disaster. But it is precisely the chaos that gives the impetus for change. The plague is a disruption to the established hierarchy of power. Not only is death an equalizer, but the authority has no power to prevent it, to save themselves let alone their underlings. In the beginning of the play, Dr. Antrechau, the play's doctor figure, expresses his inability to control the plague, "I prescribe wine and they die, no wine and they die, abstinence and they die, debauchery and they die, cold meat and they die, hot meat and they die, no meat and they die, sleep on the right side and they die, left side, ditto. I've a hundred per cent record of failure. All turn black and stinking" (6). Similar expressions of powerlessness are voiced by the merchants and the Archbishop. Once the merchants held power because of their wealth. But now as Pellico explains, "[s]uddenly the world is cold, and we are mortal, despite our gold...Money was our stout buttress, maximum intensity of greed our first principle. Such goodness worthless against this pestilence" (28-9). Even the Archbishop finds himself disempowered by the plague's deadly worms. "I'm leaving, Father Toulon, eternity's growing on my flesh. The rim and centre's breaking. Seven Cardinals, including the noble Giovanni Colunna, and hundred and five bishops're already plague-pitted, plague-dead" (18). Three of the most authoritative figures in the play, who represent science, wealth, and religion are powerless to stop the plague and are equally susceptible to its ravages. Not only is the Church unable to prevent the plague, but with death ever present, the Church's teachings of sin and damnation lose their significance (Cave 266). Authority is devalued, removed from its central position of sanctity and power.

If the plague is the carnival, the Black Ravens, the Flagellants, and the Floties are

the performers/participants. They are respectively engaged in a performance of power, a performance of servility, and a performance of resistance. The Black Ravens are the revolutionaries, and collect the pus from the sores of the dead to spread the sickness to the wealthy. Scarron explains that they "grease for a higher purpose, to wipe the slate clean, turn the world underside up, crack the Universe" (16). The Flagellants also seek to upturn the establishment. They are the extreme submissives who not only accept their lot in life, but celebrate their pain and suffering in hopes of something better in the afterlife. They threaten the authority of the Church because they place the divine within the individual thereby selling salvation for free. Free salvation is disagreeable to the Church because as Pope Clement explains in the second act, "what's to become of the most profitable function of the Holy Office--selling salvation--if men can cleanse themselves? If they're getting it free from the Flagellants we'll be forced out of the salvation business" (88).

Barnes plays up the theatricality of each of these three groups, calling attention to the performance of their ideological positions. When Grez scolds his followers, "[b]rothers, you look slovenly. Straighten up there, don't slouch" (75), there is a sense these Flagellants are keenly playing a particular role for both the other characters in the play and the audience. At another point, as the Floties become more popular and draw the crowds to their play, Grez laments, "[w]e need new ways to hold the public's interest and fetch 'em to salvation" (69). The performance of the Flagellants is most evident when Grez competes with the Floties for performance rights. Grez declares that the Flagellants will share their beliefs "Easter morn in Goldmerchants' Square, Auxerre." But the Floties have already claimed the marketplace for their performance. "No double bookings!" Toulon declares.

Barnes also has the Black Ravens perform their ideology. For instance, at one point, Scarron attempts to draw Mother Metz into the revolutionary spirit, and declares to her, "[t]he poor come truly rich when they give themselves value. Spit! (*He and Mother Metz start to spit on the corpses*) (55). The inclusion of "*caw-caw*" as part of the Ravens' dialogue as well as show tunes such as "Stay lady, stay, join lips to mine as pigeons do" (17) to accompany the removal of a dead body, further creates the sense these characters are performing as they drag dead bodies from the stage. The performative actions support the expression of their ideology and also remind the audience that these are actors performing. Each group competes for the attention of the people in the belief that they hold the answer to the suffering of the world. It is also a competition for power. With the suspension of existing hierarchies, there is a void in the rule of authority, leaving the door open for a new force to gain control.

The performance that is most significant for this discussion is the performance of the Floties. They perform resistance through laughter during all parts of the play, filling the dialogue with jokes and the action with dance steps and physical gags. The Floties are performing an identity as well as a philosophy, both rooted in contradiction, unseriousness, and extremes. It is by means of the clown and meta-theatricality that Barnes brings attention to the revolutionary potential and limitation of laughter and comedy. The clown forms the centre of the play's discourse around which other arguments on laughter are contrasted.

The Clown

Red Noses is a complex text and the clown makes up one of many themes and ideas that Barnes explores in this play. A central conflict that stands out is the desire for certainty and absolutes versus the desire or possibility for change. It is in this particular

context that Barnes includes the figure of the clown. In this play, the clown forms the centre of a particular philosophy that Barnes juxtaposes to the ruling authority as well as the philosophies of both the Flagellants and the Black Ravens. To use the terms of marxist critic Leszek Kolakowski, this conflict lies between the philosophy of the priest and the philosophy of the jester. Kolakowski argues,

> The priest is the guardian of the absolute; he sustains the cult of the final and the obvious as acknowledged by and contained in tradition. The jester is he who moves in good society without belonging to it, and treats it with impertinence; he who doubts all that appears self-evident (53).

This conflict plays out in Red Noses on several levels. It is evident between the dissenting groups in the first act, who, although they oppose the established order, guard their own beliefs as absolute. The conflict is also apparent between the Floties and the ruling authority as well as within Flote himself. These latter two examples are manifested in the context of differing religious philosophies. Before his transformation into a Red Nose, Toulon articulates his own version of this conflict: "There are no laughs in this book [Bible], 'cept God's haaa-haaa roaring in His triumph, haaa-haaa. [...] Not the laughter of fools, cackling thorns under the pot eee-heee-heee. But God's bloody laughter haaa-haaa roaring in his triumph, haaa-haaa not heee-heee" (20). Toulon distinguishes between the laughter of the fool and of God, making a point to disassociate the two. The former is a laughter of wrath and the latter, a carnival laughter, one in which the laugher includes him/herself as part of the ridicule. Flote sees God in laughter and laughter in God, whereas the Church sees laughter as a force of power and control. The action between the Floties and the Church authority unfolds as a battle between "haaa-haaa" and "heee-heee," the different laughters indicative of each group's respective philosophy.

The JESTER

The rebellion waged by the clown against the official order and its absolutes is rooted in an awareness of the inherent contradictory nature of social reality. Kolakowski argues,

> The jester's constant effort is to consider all possible reasons for contradictory ideas. It is thus dialectical by nature--simply the attempt to change what is because it is. He is motivated not by a desire to be perverse but by distrust of a stabilized system. In a world where apparently everything has already happened, he represents an active imagination defined by the opposition it must overcome (54).

The clown then, presupposes a particular world outlook, one which denies the authority of a predetermined, hierarchically organized, and ordered system. Behind the supposed unchanging social order, the clown sees infinite possibilities that oppose the established system. Kolakowski's philosophy of the jester is similar to his definition of what he calls an "inconsistently inconsistent person (240)." True to the figure of the clown, Kolakowski argues, "[i]nconsistency is simply a secret awareness of the contradictions of this world" (234).

Contradiction is a theme that is prevalent throughout Red Noses. Barnes' uncertainty as to comedy's ability to raise political consciousness leads to a meta-theatrical treatment of humour and laughter. This treatment of laughter allows Barnes to draw the audience's critical attention to the philosophy of the clown, the way the Floties use comedy in their performances, as well as the genre itself and Barnes' treatment of it. As a discourse on comedy and on laughter, one of the play's main assertions is the divergence of laughter and comedy. It is necessary for writers and critics to be aware of

the ways comedy can be both subversive as well as supportive of the status quo. The use of comedy as a means of critiquing the establishment is in itself a contradiction because comedy is already a conventional form of theatre (Carlson 303). There are rules and expectations that the genre of comedy sets in the minds of the audience and the playwright. In Walter Benjamin or Towards A Revolutionary Criticism, Terry Eagleton draws attention to the different forms of comedy, and argues that "[t]he comic drama that erases its own process of production hopes to intensify its effects by saving us the psychical expenditure that an exposure of those mechanisms would involve" (Eagleton 158). In his exposure of comedy's process of production, Barnes forces the audience to consider all the possible impacts laughter and comedy can have on the spectator.

Barnes accomplishes this goal by way of what Dukore refers to as disorienting and reorienting techniques for which Barnes is indebted to Brecht. These techniques include jokes, anachronisms, shifts from one theatrical mode to another, inventive language, song, and in an Artaudian fashion, the use of nonverbal sounds to convey meaning. For instance, Barnes will often insert a modern joke or style of humour in the context of a Jacobean style of dialogue. He also incorporates phrases, song, and language from literature and popular culture. Included in Red Noses are two plays within a play, musical interludes that interrupt the flow of action, as well as stock gags and jokes interspersed amongst dramatic dialogue. Some more specific examples of what Barnes incorporates in this play include a Latin hymn, *Dies Irae* or 'Day of Wrath', which Flote advises should be sung "with a joyful heart" (46); lyrics based on a 16th century street song, as well as references to Shakespeare, "Ah, what food these morsels be" (74); Yeats, and Augustine, "Remember St. Augustine's prayer" Clement says, "'Make me a good man, Lord, but not yet'" (49). In addition, Barnes includes a wealth of popular songs

from British music-hall and American musicals (Dukore, Theatre of Barnes 53-64). What Barnes in effect is doing is staging the process of the production of laughter. Barnes' treatment of comedy is distinct from conventional comedy which works to hide the labour costs.

Eagleton argues that Brecht's comedy "lies in its insight that any place is reversible, any signified may become a signifier, any discourse may be without warning rapped over the knuckles by some meta-discourse which may then suffer such rapping in turn" (160). This argument is reminiscent of Kolakowski's philosophy of the jester and has to do with the way the official world is threatened with the possibility of change. Faced with the inevitability of the collapse of the official order, authority attempts to mask the contradictions that are an inherent part of the social world. Contradiction suggests the existence of other possibilities. For the ruling authority to purport their social order as natural and just, they must also establish the illusion there is no dissent. When comedy constitutes a dissenting force, it suggests there is something problematic about the existing social order.

This sort of comedy is rooted in Brecht's ideas of the dialectic and is relevant to Red Noses. Barnes offers no solutions in this play and also recognizes the inevitability of change. He argues, "everything's changeable: the world is changeable, human beings are changeable, human nature is changeable" (qtd. in Dukore Theatre of Barnes 63). In this play, Barnes draws attention to the contradictory nature of social reality. The clown is the one with the outlook that sees the world in this constant state of flux. Barnes, as the playwright, is the jester. He has written a play that is in a state of contradiction, change and uncertainty, thereby making apparent the significance of contradiction within the social world.

Barnes' role as a clown is evident in the way he orchestrates the events of the play. The irreverence practiced by the Floties is also practiced by Barnes in his treatment of the play's subjects, theatrical conventions, as well as the language and dialogue. Religion is ridiculed, the plague is treated lightly, and the aura of theatre is disrupted as characters break into song and dance, make corny jokes, bad puns and play on words. Barnes' play is similar to the Floties' second performance, "Christ and Kings." In this play, Herod switches the word wicked for noble, the Floties use song to introduce the King, the guards dress in paper armour, and persons of authority are ridiculed.

These components Barnes has the Floties include in their second performance are techniques he himself uses in Red Noses. For instance, there are several times when Flote's religious experiences shift into a vaudevillian performance. Barnes has Flote receive his first sign from God in the style of a typical slapstick scenario. Following Flote's plea to God, Grez enters and Flote accepts his invitation to join the Flagellants. Upon receiving his own club, Flote has another spasm and accidentally hits Grez instead of himself. The scene continues as follows: "*The two hit each other with increasing fury, as they slowly sink to their knees. Suddenly Flote holds up his hand. Grez stops hitting him. They both listen to an unaccustomed sound: The Flagellants are actually laughing at them*" (13). The insertion of similar low styles of theatrical performance is a technique Barnes employs repeatedly throughout the text. Another example occurs at the end of scene one after Flote receives God's calling: "*He jerks violently but immediately converts his jerkings into a soft-shoe shuffle*" (24). These instances liken Barnes' style to that of Brecht's epic theatre. They function to interrupt the action of the play, but also dramatize a contradiction between the sacred performance of worship and the illegitimacy and vulgarity of vaudeville or music-hall.

The use of song throughout the play functions in a similar way. At the end of a scene, Barnes often has the group of characters sing their way off stage, which for some, such as the Flagellants and the Black Ravens, is contrary to their character. The songs do not necessarily further character development or happen out of an emotional need. For example, in the first scene, as Druce and Scarron drag off the body of Evaline, Druce sings, "Stay lady, stay, join lips to mine as pigeons do" (17). The songs momentarily separate the actors from their characters, as it seems the actors are the ones singing rather than the characters. Although Barnes is not always certain as to where the songs he includes are from (Barnes 8), they are mostly show tunes and are likely recognizable to an audience. Within the first scene, Flote sings, "Don't make it serious. Life's too mysterious" and a few lines later, "Yes, life is just a bowl of cherries, so love and laugh at it all" (14-15). Not only is this song making reference to popular culture, but it also captures Flote's new found philosophy in a single line. Another good example is found at the end of the second scene just after the Floties receive confirmation they have the square for their performance. The stage directions read, "*Upstage Centre with Camille and Marie pushing the pile of gold, Flote, Toulon, Rochfort, and Brodin follow behind in a line. Despite themselves, Grez and the Flagellants join in and they all exit in an all-jerking, all-spastic version of the Conga*" (33).

There is some indication that the meta-theatricality of this play served its purpose in jarring the audience and creating some emotional separation from the events unfolding on stage. In reference to a production by the Trinity Repertory Company in Boston, reviewer Kevin Kelly comments: "I sat through most of it in fright and laughter, terrified one moment by the grim suggestible (AIDS) reality, charmed the next by the steady show-biz shock of song and dance kept time with eloquence and vulgarity (Boston

Globe." However, the theatricality of this play in some cases also limited the political potential of the production.

As with August, the production of Red Noses requires a fine balance between spectacle and politics. In Red Noses, however, the risk lies in the loss of Barnes' complex dialogue that forms a central part of the play's politics. If the spectacle becomes the sole focus of the production, the politics behind the spectacle is lost. This problem appears to have occurred at the play's premiere under the direction of Terry Hands at the Royal Shakespeare Company. Despite a mix of reviews, a common criticism was the watered down production that emphasized cute theatrical devices rather than the complexity of Barnes' dialogue and story. Cave argues that the director "blurred the argument of the play by adding numerous gimmicky visual effects, not devised by Barnes, which distracted attention away from the dialogue at crucial moments" (267). In his review for The Times, Irving Wardle argues that Hands' production disinfected Barnes' material creating a "genial atmosphere." Michael Coveney from the Financial Times was critical of what he called the play's "decadent splendor and outrageous banality" (13). Other reviews express disappointment with the play's comedy and theatricality but emphasize the lack of humour. A review of a Boston production in 1989 notes that in the second act, the play "ran smack against its own dread enemy: seriousness" (Kelly). A review of the RSC's production criticizes the play for being "tame in its comedy" and suggests that Barnes' equipped the Floties with bad jokes (Edwards).

These criticisms stem from the difficulty in bringing together the complex layers of Red Noses that Barnes uses to problematize comedy and laughter. The spectacle, the bad jokes, and the various bits of seriousness, all form a part of the way in which Barnes stages the production of laughter. If the spectacle becomes the focal point, or if the bad

jokes seem too genuine, these elements lose their significance as methods of alienation in the dramatization of the politics. Although Red Noses is a very theatrical play, if the theatricality becomes the focus of the production, the point has been missed. Barnes is trying to call attention to theatricality, on stage, and in the social world. Even with the Floties, a group of characters with whom the audience sympathizes, Barnes makes fun. Throughout the play there is a sense that Barnes is the clown challenging the audience with his "needle of mockery" (Kolakowski 55).

Beyond seeing Barnes as a clown in his role as playwright, the philosophy of the jester is evident in the group of traveling clowns whom Barnes has made the focus of the play. Despite the uncertainty of the political effectiveness of the Floties' comedy, the philosophical implications of the Floties and Flote's goal of creating freedom through laughter establish the Floties as a subversive group. The Floties are walking contradictions, a characteristic made clear when Flote and Sonnerie hold auditions for the clown troupe. First there is LeGrue, who declares himself "the best stone-blind juggler in the French and Norman lands" (38) and his assistant and drummer Bembo, who enters "*shaking slightly with palsy*" (37). Next is Frapper, who is described as a "quick wit and stand-up jibster, singer of songs and sender of frolics" (38) but once he begins his audition, it becomes clear he is not a typical comedian: "S-s-s-s-sires a f-f-f-funny thing h-h-h-h-er-er..." and before he can finish the rest of the story "*Brodin guides him out*" (39). For their audition, the Boutros' brothers enter "*on crutches to the tune of 'When you're smiling,' thumping down on their one good leg as they dance across the stage*" (39). In addition there is Marguerite, a lustful nun, and even Flote, a jesting priest. As a group, they are the clowns who succeed despite all odds against them and the ones with whom Barnes wants to place the audience's sympathies (Coveney 13). But although the

audience sympathizes with these characters, they are also aware of the threat the Floties pose. Following the auditions, Toulon expresses his distaste, highlighting the way these performers reject the boundaries of their physical state: "It's God's judgement that the blind, dumb and crippled stay so, till prayer and repentance change it. They're guilty and must accept their punishments, not make light of them in their vaunting pride" (39). These performers refuse to conform and practice irreverence for any serious interpretation of the world. Their interactions with each other and their treatment of the world around them provide evidence of their philosophical practice.

The red nose, the contemporary symbol of the clown is what signals to the audience that Barnes is playing with a particular theatrical convention. The red nose also signifies a particular mentality, character, and perspective and gives the Floties permission to act as they do. Although the red nose has only become a fixed component of the clown in the past two hundred years, it holds a special status in the field of signs. The red nose is indexical. It does not represent the clown, but it is the clown and holds this meaning even without being attached to the body of an actor as clown.

In Red Noses this sign, as the symbol of the Floties (Dukore, Theatre 40), distinguishes them from the other characters. Production reviews provide some sense of how the Floties signify as a group. One reviewer writes that the Floties are "the motley evidence in another debate about power, laughter, and (more precisely) the power of laughter" (Nightingale 33). Another reviewer argues, "Barnes presents us through the red-nosed Floties with a true religion based on joy, laughter and communal wealth" (Billington, "A Brilliance" 10). It is useful then, to see the red nose as a philosophy as well as an argument that forms part of Barnes' discourse on laughter.

In an interview with Clive Barker, Barnes explains that he finds it useful to use

songs in his plays because "they convey in a real flash not only emotional states but eras which pages of dialogue can't do" (10). In this play, the red nose fulfills a similar role. Barnes does include verbal clues and explanations to give the audience a sense of who the Floties are, but the red nose captures all these ideas in one concrete sign. The red nose is not about conveying past eras, or even emotional states, but rather conveys a particular character, the clown, and all the subsequent associations this figure suggests. Once Flote realizes his calling, he "*puts on a clown's bulbous red nose and sings:* Don't make it serious. Life's too mysterious. You work, you pray, you worry so. But you can't take your gold when you go, go, go..." (14). From the moment Flote puts on the nose, Barnes is signaling to the audience a specific mentality, style of performance, and behaviour. The red-nosed clown will mean many things to an audience. The fool can be witty, conniving, impertinent, deceptive, ignorant, and innocent.

In making the Floties red nosed clowns, Barnes is doing several things. On the one hand, he is carnivalizing his own characters, creating a bit of mockery about priests who think they can save the world with laughter. He also uses the identification of the clown as performer to raise questions about the political role performers have, as well as to emphasize the element of performance in this play. But most significantly, Barnes uses the clown to draw attention to an alternative philosophy. In this context, the red nose signifies serious unseriousness, inconsistent inconsistency, chaos, instability, change, and endless possibility.

The use of the red nose has a strong impact on the performance of the actors playing the Floties. Clowning is a specific style of performance that is distinct from other character based, psychologically driven acting. Barnes' play does not necessarily require a standard method of acting, but the use of the red nose should inform the actors'

performance. The red nose does signify on its own to the audience but it is also a mask and should have an impact on the actor's performance. When an actor wears a mask, it informs the actor's physicality depending on whether the mask is that of an old man, a young woman, or an animal. Similarly, the clown's mask also shapes the physicality of the actor. There is a distinction between Flote the priest, and Flote the clown, one which should be identifiable in the performance.

In a production at Grant MacEwan College, December 2003, the significance of this shift in performance based on the red nose became evident, due to the lack of distinction between the Floties with nose and without nose. Not only are the Floties distinct from the other characters, but their clown identity is distinct from their non clown identity. These particular actors lost this differentiation as well as the one between the clowns and the other characters. The red nose appeared as more of a costume prop, rather than a powerful mask. In a Boston production, the use of the red nose as mask appears to have been more evident. A reviewer notes the skill of the actor playing Father Flote which suggests he was successful in creating a distinctly clown performance: "The skill behind Gerety's eagerness keeps it constant without making it a one-note attitude, then gives it a dimension of genuine pathos. In an awe-inspiring moment, Gerety leads "A Dance of Lepers" you won't soon forget, doing it with a soft-shoe grace that becomes a metaphor of the play's joy" (Kelly 89). Coveney writes that the RSC's Father Flote, Anthony Sher "plays the capricious, mock innocent Flote with a deft spasmodic genuflection-come-dance-step the moment he addresses the Almighty and a quiet, gnomic asperity elsewhere" (13). The impact of the red nose on the actors is important, because Flote and his fellow Floties not only celebrate their philosophy and ridicule authority in Barnes' dialogue but also in the style of performance. In Coveney's review, there is

clearly a distinction in the way Flote performs for God and for the other characters. His clownish style of worship forms an important part of the way he undermines God's might and glory.

The subversive quality of the Floties' philosophy can be further supported by looking at the politics of laughter. In Carnival and Theater Michael Bristol argues that laughter can be a philosophy in its own right. It is a possible way of seeing the world, one which is distinct from serious interpretations (130). As an alternative world outlook, laughter opposes the dominant perspectives rooted in the official world that might include a range of philosophies/ideologies such as religion, positivism, capitalism, or intellectualism. Bakhtin argues that carnival laughter has to do with seeing the world "in its laughing aspect" and is manifested in the literature of parody (13). When Flote accepts his calling from God to be a clown, he begins to see the world in this particular way and seeks to spread this philosophy to others. His argument for the life of a clown suggests a subversive power in distraction. He explains to the recently recruited Floties:

> We'll sing, dance and tell funny tales and all around us people will laugh and up there in Paradise the saints will interrupt their endless hosannas and laugh too. And the angels will forget their nocturnal missions and flutter their wings and chuckle the while. And the Judges of the Last Judgement will have to stop their judging for they will be chortling with glee. And the Supreme Judge himself will turn aside from sad pleas and soul-breaking prayers to hear the unfamiliar sound of joy, and perhaps, He will forget His wrath hearing His people praise Him in laughter, *aaa-ooh-aah* (26-7).

There is potentially a power in laughter as a distraction because it disrupts the orderly

organization of the social order.

Another central component of laughter's politics is that it is not easily controlled. Bristol argues that laughter "is linked, not only to clearly recognizable aberration and deformity, but also to structural ambiguity in the social system and to discord experienced as a result of that ambiguity" (129). Authority can not predetermine how or when persons will respond with laughter. What Bristol emphasizes is that although a deviation from the norm could potentially be used to reinforce conformity, as an unintended consequence, attention is also drawn to disharmony within the social structure. Laughter is an elusive reaction, beyond the control of those in power. There is no means to ensure one response occurs and another does not. By practicing comedy, by performing in the red nose, the Floties are encouraging a visceral response to the social world which cannot be controlled by dogma or power. This visceral response is evident for example in the Floties' first performance. In ridiculing Death, the Floties encourage their audience to think beyond the ideas of death articulated by the Church. By responding in laughter to the image of death the Floties create on stage, the audience circumvents the Church's rational on death. This is what Flote and the Floties offer that is distinct from the religion of the ruling Church. Religion and laughter are both irrational responses to the organization and existence of the world. Religion however, purports itself to be orderly, and although it might be an irrational response, it is controlled and manipulated by persons in power. Laughter evades control and thereby maintains its irrationality. It is therefore, inherently subversive and menacing. Flote has found God in laughter as well as laughter in God and he seeks to bring this idea to others.

Barnes often treats God as a totem used by those in power to justify their authority and the consequential hierarchical order (Innes 299). Flote's position is contrary

to the teachings of the Church. Not only does it present a possible spiritual path that circumvents that need for the hierarchy of the Church, but it also undermines the seriousness and orderliness of Church doctrine. According to Flote and the Floties, "God's a joker" (103). As a joker, God can not be full of wrath or revenge. His laughter is the joking, zany "heee-heee" not the triumphant, wrathful "haaa-haaa." With his group of Christ's Clowns, Flote takes carnival out of temporary existence and into the daily lives of the people. He declares to the Archbishop: "I'll hold a daily Fools' Feast. With thy blessing others'll join. We'll form a brotherhood of joy, Christ's clowns, God's zanies--that's us the Red Noses of Auxerre" (19). Pope Clement describes the Floties' philosophy when he condemns the troupe at the end of the play: "It's honest, God-driven men like you, Father Flote, I can't trust. You live by no rules except what's in your heart. Without rules and laws, every man becomes a law unto himself. So I must give your company strict rules and orders" (100). Clement is speaking to Flote as an individual. But the issue he raises has to do with the breakdown of rule and order if the authority is not adhered to, a threat posed by the jester. Flote and his fellow clowns are promoting an understanding of the world that defies rules and boundaries. He wants to take the carnivalesque of something such as the Fool's Feast into the everyday lives of the people, denying the authority the Church maintains.

The philosophy of the jester and laughter that the Floties practice is manifested primarily in their irreverent treatment of their surrounding world. Seeing God as a joker, or religion in laughter, is an irreverent treatment of highly serious material. Through this practice, the Floties undermine power by negating the value of meaning determined by those in authority. In his essay "The Social Dynamics of Comedy" Roger B. Henkle notes the importance of the relationship between power and meaning. More specifically,

Henkle raises the issue of how those in power assign meaning and in turn determine the importance or value of words, objects, and persons. Power then is perceived as a game in which the Establishment controls the significance and hierarchy of meaning. Comedy provides a counter game and "by its irreverence comedy makes us uneasy with the notion of importance" (Henkle 213). Irreverence has to do in part with the way meaning is devalued, which in turn creates an instability of meaning and the possibility for change (Henkle 216).

Barnes gives the Floties multiple means by which to treat matters of seriousness with irreverence: Marguerite hangs their laundry on the cross, all dialogue among the Floties and between them and the other characters is scattered with jokes and puns, and responses to orders or questions by authority figures are unpredictable and often subversive.

When the Red Noses' perform with their clown noses on, a whole series of persons are symbolically reduced to fools. God, King Herod, Death, Mary, Joseph, Jesus and the three Wise Men all are performed in red nose. The red nose immediately devalues these characters. It is a form of carnivalization, a bringing down to earth of high status persons. A great example is the impromptu trial Flote and others initiate as a means to prevent the Black Ravens execution.

> FLOTE. Before you can han'em there must be a trial, lawyers, Inns-of-Court-men, arguing pro and contra. (*He puts on a lawyer's gown*) (92).

Following suit, Marguerite puts on a gown, and Frapper takes out his dummy who is also dressed as a lawyer. The three proceed to engage Monselet in a mock legal discussion about the reasons to and not to hang Druce and Scarron. The Floties easily slip into the role of lawyers, playing up their performance while undermining the authenticity of

justice and the profession of law.

Barnes also explores how meaning and language is problematic in the character of Sonnerie, whose language is unlike that of any other character. In his interview with Clive Barker, Barnes talks a bit about his childhood experience at fairgrounds and amusement arcades. As part of this discussion, Barnes mentions the significance of language and notes how language was often used "to cover up what [people were] doing" (On Class 8). Barnes is referring to the shouts of the arcade owners that deceptively draw people into their game. He notes "that element of using language for improper purposes is something I think you'd find in the plays" (On Class 8). Language is certainly an important element in Red Noses. It is of note then, that Barnes includes Sonnerie, a character whose costume is "covered with tiny silver bells which ring gently" (17) with which he communicates. If language forms part of the maintenance of the official order, resistance exists beyond the barriers of language. Flote flags the problem in language when he says "speech is blasphemous, silence a lie; beyond the speech and silence, blasphemy and lie is another way" (93). Earlier, when Frapper regains his ability to speak, he makes a similar observation. "But I know behind the words are other words inaudible, and behind those words, there is silence. We don't fear it, thanks to you Father Flote" (77). Words have a superficial meaning which can be manipulated for the purposes of deceit and control. But behind these words lies another way of understanding and interpretation. In Sonnerie, Barnes captures this alternative way of communicating. Sonnerie's language does not create change, but he does undermine language's authority. Those in power need language to maintain control, but Sonnerie transcends this need and stands as a strong resistance to the way language is abused by those in power. Sonnerie's bells capture the fluidity of meaning that is lost once language is centralized under a single authority.

The PRIEST

The antagonism between the priest and the jester arises out of Kolakowski's argument about the way modern philosophy questions established systems of thought. Kolakowski draws attention to the importance of absolutes in guiding individuals' sense of value and meaning in life. Whether in theology or philosophy, there is a constant desire to trust in some form of universal justice (Kolakowski 32), some form of an absolute. But within this desire for certainty, Kolakowski also emphasizes the desire for individuals to have an impact in shaping social reality. There is a struggle between wanting security, but also wanting to have the power to make change (Kolakowski 38). This struggle results in a desire to combat absolutes.

Philosophy provides a means for rebellion against absolutes in revelation. According to Kolakowski, revelation is needed, "not in order to know with certainty what the world really is, but to evaluate all the opinions of the world that we encounter" (39). In revelation philosophy makes the effort to question all that is obvious. But as philosophy creates revelations by questioning existing systems of thought, it in turn establishes a new system of thought (Kolakowski 41). There is a finality in this process. As Kolakowski notes, this position suggests "the goal of every movement is rest" (40). Immobility becomes the desired outcome, making mobility "a deformity" that implies a need. In philosophy, this means that movement in thought occurs because previous thoughts were imperfect. Perfection then, goes hand in hand with immobility. In Bakhtinian terms, the new thought establishes a new official order that demands conformity to its own rules. The new official world loses its transience and becomes complete. Mobility is like carnival and immobility is like the official order.

Although Barnes in many ways celebrates the philosophy of the jester, he also is

sure to problematize it by questioning its impact against the existence of, as well as the belief in, absolutes. The desire for the certainty of order over the uncertainty of freedom is problematic because it results in submission to the ruling authority. Barnes is highly critical of this psychology of submission which he considers to play a key role in the reproduction of power structures. In the introduction to Barnes Plays: Two he writes, "[t]he English have learned, over the years, to fall on their knees, touch their forelocks, and sit up and beg, all at the same time" (x). Later he points out, "the whole history of the world can't show one single instance of oppression being ended by the humility of the oppressed" (x). Christopher Innes notes that Barnes believes that people "value permanence and certainty (even the certainty of slaughter), above personal responsibility and the unknown risks of freedom" (307). This submissive psychology is evident in Red Noses. In a time of devastation for which there seems to be no purpose or reason, people turn to different systems of belief in order to find serenity. The Flagellants, the Black Ravens, and the Floties all seek a purpose in the midst of devastation.
The common people look to those in power for aid and also seek an escape from their immediate reality.

There are two parts to Barnes' argument about submission. In the first instance, Barnes is critical of people's resistance to change because of their desire for certainty and comfort. This resistance is evident in both characters with and without power. Pope Clement, Archbishop Monselet, as well as Pellico and LeFranc are all characters in positions of power and therefore order and stability are of use to them. "Now the plague has passed," Clement declares, "we must immediately limit, tame, subordinate, rule. Submission and belief, the twin poles of the world must be restored" (87). In the final scene, the Floties discover one of their own, Rochfort, has left the group to join the ranks

of the powerful. The Pope explains to Flote that "I feel safe with his [Rochfort] treachery and greed. It's honest, God-driven men like you, Father Flote I can't trust" (100). Flote's behaviour is unpredictable, but the Pope can count on Rochfort to be consistent. The antagonism between the priest and the jester is evident between these authority characters and the Floties. But this conflict plays out on a more subtle level among the groups without power.

Ironically, it is the Pope who acknowledges the people's desire for certainty. When Flote asks the Pope for approval of the Floties, he questions the Pope's desire for wolves over sheep. "But wolves don't see the hurt man or hear the starving child, the lark's summer song" Flote explains. "It's a small price to pay," the Pope retorts, "to remove the terrible necessity of choice from mankind. The people want bread and certainty" (50). This desire is also expressed by many of the people themselves. For instance, prior to the Floties' first play, Scarron, one of the Black Ravens, tries to make Mother Metz see the need to destroy the wealthy and powerful. Scarron is coming from a desire to create a revolution, but Mother Metz's response shows that her concern is not with the system of power but with her own needs. She asks Scarron, "Then will I have furs enough to cover the moon? Wine enough to drown Jerusalem? Alps of powdered sugar, stewed prunes and mutton for dinner? [...] Will I be rich?" (55). Wealth and power are seen as providers of security and are therefore upheld as desirable goals. Indirectly, this perspective on the social order also supports the submission to power. Toulon, for example, before he becomes a Flotie, expresses a comfort with order and declares, "[c]ompromise is for the weak, concessions for cowards. I never yield or compromise. I obey. Obedience is the first vow of religion" (26).

As part of the people's desire for certainty and order is the desire for an escape

from the reality of their immediate reality. This desire is evident in the response and expectations of the Floties' performances. When Scarron tries to convince the Floties' audience to join the revolution, Patris, one of the spectators, responds: "But all we did is come to see if there's any laughter in the poor-house sir" (55). The Floties are well liked by the people, because these clowns offer them the chance to temporarily transcend the reality of their existence. Although the Floties are subversive, in the first act they in fact perpetuate the people's inertia. Here Barnes criticizes carnival's promise of freedom. Carnival simply provides an escape, but does not instigate change.

Secondly, Barnes is also questioning the impact of submission to fight oppression, a strategy of the clown. Barnes questions this strategy, but it is one he has the Floties employ in their performance of resistance. Again, Barnes establishes this strategy as a conflict. Flote may be a clown and the leader of this group of comedians, but he is also a priest. Flote's wish at the beginning of the play is to find a purpose for himself in a time of utter hopelessness. As a priest, he relies on God to guide him and believes there is some higher meaning to what happens on earth. Flote also adheres to the authority of the Church. When he first forms the clown troupe, Flote is sure to seek the blessing of both the Archbishop and then the Pope. Once Flote is sanctioned by the Archbishop, he travels to Avignon to ask Pope Clement for his approval. To confirm Flote's true loyalty, Clement asks him, "Will you believe I am His true voice on earth, Christ's voice and obey?" Flote responds, "Flesh breaks! I obey, aaa-ooh-aah. (*He jerks violently.*) Noses go down. I renounce mirth and joy" (51). Fortunately for Flote he does not have to submit. Clement sanctions Flote's troupe of traveling clowns, claiming that Flote will be "a useful lubricant" as the world goes through a difficult period of unrest.

Similar to August, there is an ambiguity to Flote's submission. There is a sense of

opportunism in his actions. Eagleton offers a perspective that connects the clown with the revolutionary, that supports the potential for submission to be considered as a method of subversion:

> Living provisionally yet self-protectively, having a quick eye to the main chance, bowing humbly to the mighty only the more effectively to butt them in the stomach, entangling the enemy in his own rhetoric: all these may be qualities of the clown, but they are qualities of the revolutionary too (170).

This deliberate act of bowing to those in power, is a tactic that is possible to see in Flote's actions. He uses the Church to undermine their teachings. In his review of the RSC production Coveney writes of a "mock innocent Flote" (13). This conflict between Flote as priest and as jester supports the complexity that Barnes creates in this play. The opportunism of the clown's loyalty can be understood as part of his/her practice of resistance.

The conflict of the priest and the jester within Flote can also be understood by what Dukore calls "the Problem of Goodness" ("Peter Barnes" 155). Barnes considers goodness to be something of a temptation and writing about a good person is in itself a difficult task (Dukore, "Peter Barnes" 157). Goodness can be understood as a kind of absolute. To pursue goodness as an absolute moral law can be problematic. Kolakowski raises this issue in his discussion of practicing consistency as opposed to inconsistency. He is critical of consistent practice and as an example he argues that a consistent person will cooperate with the secret police because s/he knows it is necessary to uphold the state (232). Goodness can be perceived in a similar way. Following an unswerving path of goodness, can potentially lead to actions that are in fact unjust. Flote pursues this path of

goodness as part of his practice of the clown. Initially, his wish to be a clown comes from a place of wanting to do good. There is a contradiction in the way that Flote submits to authority and believes in the will of God, yet pursues a philosophy of the jester and of laughter.

Production of Laughter

Throughout the play, there are numerous ways that Barnes complicates the Floties' performance of resistance. This complication is most strongly apparent in the juxtaposition of the first and second act, between a time of chaos and a time of normalcy. The impact of these two contexts is made evident in the two plays the Floties perform and the reactions of their audience. The Floties perform "Everyman" during the plague (carnival) and "Christ and Kings" when the plague has ended (the day after carnival). It is in these plays that Barnes dramatizes the process of the production of laughter to question the value of the clowns' philosophy. The Floties perform resistance throughout the play. But the question Barnes raises is what kind of impact their performance actually has on the structures of power? Does laughter in fact create or instigate change?

As in August there are two audiences in Red Noses. The Floties always perform for both the spectators within the play and those outside the play. The audience then, observes the Floties' performances first hand, but also observes the reactions of the audience in the play. The characters' reactions to the Floties' performances cue the audience as to how they should react (Dukore, Theatre 44). In order to establish his position that laughter can be distracting, Barnes needs to situate the audience as an object of criticism. By forcing the audience to watch the reactions of additional spectators, Barnes makes the audience witness to both the failure and potential of laughter and makes them aware of what the play's spectators want from the Floties' performances.

In the Grant MacEwan production, for instance, the Floties' plays were staged in such a way that the members of the audience were positioned as part of the marketplace. The actors sat in and around the spectators bridging the relationship between the fictional and real audience. The Floties performed the play for both audiences, drawing the live audience into each play. But each time one of the characters interrupted the play-within-the-play, the audience's attention was drawn back into the story of Red Noses. There are many layers of spectatorship during these two performances that Barnes plays with to make apparent the divergence in laughter as well as to question laughter's political impact.

Barnes makes clear in Red Noses that laughter can be the ally of both the rulers and the ruled. The Pope sees laughter as a source of propaganda, whereas Flote believes that in laughter, there is a chance for self awareness (Cave 267). According to the Pope, laughter is fine as long it involves pleasing "the populace with passing shows; relax them with culinary delights--meringues, jellies and whipped cream. But give them no meat to chew on" (100). In the first act during a carnivalesque period, Flote's ways are of use to the Pope. "I see you as a useful lubricant, Father," the Pope explains, "holy oil" (51). The Pope knows that times of chaos create possibilities for change and that "there's liberation in the plague air as well as worms" (51). He wants the populace to be distracted from their misery, to ensure they remain unaware of the reality of their existence. Because the plague has already disrupted the power of the ruling authorities the dissenting groups are of little threat to the Church.

By looking at the themes explored in each performance and the subsequent reactions of the audience, the juxtaposition Barnes creates between carnival and the day after is evident. In the Floties' first play, "Everyman," Death is treated as the enemy, and Death is the character the Floties attempt to undermine. God sends Death to Everyman to

reinstill the wrath of God. Death sets out to fulfill the plan, but ends up being distracted by Everyman into a game of dice, as Everyman attempts to gamble his life back. Brodin sums up the message the Floties have attempted to show at the end of the play.

> Death doesn't count, and probably doesn't read or write either. When he comes again we'll play it to the very end. Whether dying in a privy or marble halls, green field or white bed, the hand pointing to zero, the smell in your throat, don't do Death's job for him. Don't start dying before you die, already half dead. Don't go easy, make him work for you, let the calendar tear its own leaves, fight dirty (63).

This performance causes the play's audience to laugh and distracts them from their misery. There is however, a subversive element to this play. When Everyman tricks Death into playing dice, he not only denies Death control but undermines the image of a God of wrath and vengeance. Also, Death does not obey his order and refutes God's overarching power. The Floties want to free their audience from the bondage of their existence. However, the notable absence of the characters of authority at this first performance is of significance. Here, Barnes is critical of the Bakhtinian model. When hierarchies are suspended and the daily organization of life is disrupted, laughter can be liberating, a power that is questionable once order is restored.

Flote realizes in the beginning of the second act that their philosophy of joy is not enough. "Before our jibes lacked salt," Flote says, "But every jest should be a small revolution. We come to ding down dignity and make a new world, opening the gates of Paradise above and here below" (79). With the end of the plague, the Flagellants, the Black Ravens, and the Floties decide to join together to make change. "All forms of rebellion must come together" Flote declares (80). In the first act, Flote did not consider

change, but rather sought to bring joy to a mirthless world. In the second act, Flote sees that laughter must be tied with revolution if it is to have any impact at all. In their second performance, Flote and his troupe turn to persons of authority and characters from authoritative texts as their target of ridicule. Right from the beginning of this play there is a clear distinction from the first one. For instance, King Herod, played by Flote, declares near the start, "I, King Herod, decree the word 'wicked' shall be replaced by the word 'noble'" (104), and draws attention to the arbitrary assignation of meaning by those in positions of power. In addition, the Floties play the roles of Biblical and religious persons such as the Virgin Mary and Joseph much to the disgrace of the Pope.

The reactions to the second performance draw attention to the differences in laughter. Monselet declares at the sight of the manger scene, "Anathema! You mock God. For the authority of kings, yea even Herod's, comes from God, and in mocking them you mock Him" (98). Pellico, Camille and Marie are also dissatisfied with what they see on stage.

> PELLICO. They want to make us think.
>
> CAMILLE. That's not fair.
>
> MARIE. We didn't come here to think (98).

But when the play continues, and Herod's soldiers carry "a large wicker basket filled with dolls in swaddling clothes which they tip on to the floor" and "make the sounds of babies crying and screaming" (103), the audience is outraged both by the horror of the scene and its seriousness.

> SABINE. Stop! Are you men?
>
> PATRIS. Spit on your orders!
>
> MONSELET. We were promised soothing syrup.

LEFRANC. But see what they give us.

PELLICO. Where are the jollies? (103).

Several things occur in these audience reactions. The Floties cause concern and dissent among some members of the audience. They witness the brutality of Herod's power and declare the injustice of it. Also, the powerful characters express a distaste for the lack of "soothing syrup." The Floties make an impact and, perhaps as a result of this fact, they are also derided for being too serious rather than providing distracting humour. It is in this final performance, that Barnes brings to the forefront the question of laughter's impact in the face of established authority. What impact, if any, will the Floties' comedy have on their ruling order? Barnes offers two possible answers. There is the suggestion that the Floties do threaten the Pope and his authority, but there is also a clear indication that the Pope is the one who triumphs.

When the Pope witnesses the Floties' new comedy, he wants to ensure he has control over the Floties' performance. "Obey or die" (101), he declares. When the Floties continue their performance as they please, the Pope bursts out with, "[i]t isn't funny!" (103). Flote agrees and acknowledges the limitations in his philosophy of laughter: "I tried to lift Creation from bondage with mirth. Wrong. Our humour was a way of evading truth, avoiding responsibility. Our mirth was used to divert attention whilst the strong ones slunk back to their thrones and palaces where they stand now in their saggy breeches and paper crowns, absurd like me" (103-4). With this final outburst by Flote, the Pope has enough and orders his death. "Stand aside from that man. He is anathema!" the Pope declares, "Stand aside from that man. He is marked for death" (104). The second act is what one reviewer refers to as "the supreme test for comedy" and "as Barnes tells the story, it fails" (Wardle). In many ways this statement is true. The Floties reject the red

nose and are killed.

But, despite their inevitable execution, the Floties continue to practice their unique philosophy and snub authority. This snubbing occurs most strongly during their execution. Confronted with his inevitable execution Flote declares, "I tell you, when Death comes a-knock-knock-knocking the best course it to run. But just sometimes you have to stand your ground and dance!" (104). One by one the rest of the Floties join in Flote's dance. The guards proceed and shoot all dancers but Flote. As the last clown left, Flote continues to clown right up until the last moment.

> FLOTE. One must have sport even with death. (*He kneels and slowly levers himself up till he is standing on his head. Clement VI raises his hand again.*)
>
> FIRST GUARD. Your Holiness, we can shoot a man in the back, but not standing on his head. It isn't natural (106).

Even in death the Floties manage to subvert the status quo. Similarly to August and his family, the execution of the Red Noses reinforces the threat their performances and philosophy pose to the ruling authority. Innes notes, "[b]y offering themselves as sacrificial participants in a real-life version of Herod's Massacre of the Innocents through their protest, the comedians reveal the true nature of the power structure" (303). The Pope re-performs the massacre the Floties first performed in "Christ and Kings." He is the one who establishes a relationship between the events on the Floties' stage and the reality within Red Noses. Threatened by the Floties' performance he sees fit to have them executed in turn proving the Floties' point. The result is a contradictory performance of power that in fact exposes the authority of the Pope. The Church needed the Red Noses. Clement and Monselet exploit these performers and their will to face the

plague in order to preserve the authority of the Church. "Don't you remember" Clement says to Monselet, "you sanctioned Father Flote's Red-Nosed Fools and I ratified the decision. A good decision. He's helped keep unrest to a minimum; made men more readily accept their miserable lot. Flote's proved useful. A revolution never returns" (88). But the Red Noses were underestimated and what at first proved useful became a threat.

Barnes does leave the last word with the Red Noses, ending the play with the philosophy of the clown. In his final moment before entering the gates of heaven, Flote declares: "A world ruled by seriousness alone is an old world, a grave, grave-yard world. Mirth makes the green sap shout and the wildebeest run mad" (109). Barnes does not offer an answer to the question of laughter's role in creating social change, but the epilogue ensures that his verdict on comedy is not completely negative or hopeless. The Floties are killed and the Church's power and the Pope's authority remain intact. Barnes is sure to have the established hierarchy in place at the end of the play to reinforce the power of the Establishment and the limitation of the Floties' philosophy.

The clowns in Red Noses and August share a similar fate. By the end of Kohout's play, August and his family are killed and the circus hierarchy is maintained. In Red Noses, the ruling authority is restored and Flote and his followers are eliminated. In both plays, the clowns do not succeed in defeating the established social order, but their deaths prove them to be a viable threat. Throughout each play, the clowns' subversive actions and behaviour draw attention to the hierarchical organization of power. They succeed in positing an alternative understanding of the social world, one that exposes and in some instances, undermines the authorities and their power.

Conclusion

The politics of the clown have been established in the context of carnival theory in which Bakhtin argues that there is an opposition between medieval folk culture and the official world. This opposition carries over to the politics of the clown, in that the clown, as the representative of carnival, stands as an antithesis to the established ordered, unitary, and hierarchic social order. The clown is a theatrical convention that has appeared in a multitude of dramatic contexts. The clown then, is a character the audience will immediately recognize and they in turn will respond in a particular, conventionalized way. As a result, the clown has permission to act and behave in a carnivalesque way that consists of breaking from conventions of both the social world and the theatre. These actions include stepping out of the events on stage and interacting with the audience, a refusal to acknowledge difference, mis/re-interpretation of language and meaning, as well as an irreverence for serious, sacred, and authoritative persons, objects, and ideas. The clash of carnival and official world enables the clown to expose hierarchies and structures of power, while simultaneously undermining authority. This juxtaposition between carnival and official world sets up the politics in both August August, August and Red Noses and in both plays the clown emerges as a political character.

The clowns in both Barnes' and Kohout's plays are positioned within an hierarchy, in which those at the top attempt to subdue and control the clowns' actions and behaviour. In each play however, the clowns are successful in subverting the official order by means of their carnivalesque practices. But by the end of both August and Red Noses, the clowns end up losing their identity and are killed by those in power. With the death of the clowns in both plays, clearly the limitations of carnival are brought forward. Throughout, the clowns assert a powerful performance of resistance. But carnival ends

and order is restored. The end of carnival and the death of the clown raises some questions about the political impact of the clown character. What does it mean if the social order is restored? Does this limit the clown's capacity as a political character?

In Red Noses and August August, August a central part of the clowns' politics is based on a paradox, namely the derivation of power from a lack of power. This characteristic helps to understand how the clowns' death in fact furthers his/her political role. In each play, the authority figures at first allow the clowns to perform and pursue their goals. August is encouraged to become the circus director and the Floties are sanctioned by both the Pope and the Archbishop. The authorities agree to these sanctions, only because they are confident they can also maintain control. The clowns are perceived as powerless. In both plays however, the clowns are more successful than expected. Once they start to push the boundaries too far and undermine the authority of those in power, they are punished. Rather than negating the politics of the clown, it is in the punishing that the clown's politics are reinforced. In the punishment, those in positions of authority acknowledge the clown's power to disrupt the social hierarchy and in turn their own vulnerabilities. At the same time, the punishment is testament to the power of the authority and the extent to which they will go to maintain their position.

This theme of paradox that forms such a central part of the clown's politics is also apparent in other aspects of the clown. In addition to power in powerlessness, another dominant paradox of the clown is a serious unseriousness. For instance, the clown will make fun, argue a position, or paint a picture in a deliberate serious manner, but one that is completely unserious. The clown will almost always behave ambivalently, creating a multitude of possibilities for interpretation and in the possibility of action. Paradox then, informs the clown's politics by establishing the clown as a contradictory character who

denies stasis in any form. In his/her actions and reactions, the clown maintains multiplicity of power and meaning.

Beyond this particular discussion on the clown as a political character, there are several possibilities for further research that are of note, namely the trickster and the minstrel figures. The clowns in Red Noses and August are drawn from the European/American tradition of the auguste circus clown that has merged into theatre performance in a variety of ways. This particular analysis of clown is rooted in a Western tradition and understanding. The trickster is a theatrical and performative clown-like figure rooted in a non-Western tradition, and an analysis of this figure would broaden the scope of the clown's political potential. Tomson Highway is a playwright who has incorporated this figure into some of his plays such as The Rez Sisters (1986) and Dry Lips Oughta Move To Kapukasing (1989). Another trickster example is *Ananse*, an everyman character from Ghanaian storytelling traditions. Playwright Efua Sutherland argues that this character is a means for a society to criticize itself and she uses this character in her play The Marriage of Anansewa (1975). The trickster is a clown like figure, but one that also has his/her own particular characteristics. It would be exciting to explore how this figure functions as a political character.

Similarly, the minstrel figure also offers an additional perspective on clown as political. The minstrel is a racist stereotype developed by white American performers in the nineteenth century. African-American performers have however, attempted to re-appropriate this stereotype and re-invent the character as a subversive figure. It has been established that the clown's lack of power in fact gives him/her power which creates the potential for the minstrel character to be re-appropriated to subvert the very system from which he/she was created. The politics of submitting to authority in order to better

undermine them is evident in Spike Lee's film Bamboozled (2000), or Susan Lori Parks' play The American Play (1992), both of whom attempt to use the minstrel figure as a political character.

A central question that emerges from this discussion is what is the future of the clown in political performance? The clown remains a relevant and significant figure in the theatre and more specifically as a strategy in the development of a political theatre practice. The convention of the clown is an artistic and political strategy and also enables playwrights and performers to make disguised critical statements. The strength of the clown as a political character lies in the dialectic perspective s/he offers, the way the clown takes advantage of an audience's expectations, as well as the spontaneous creation of the performer-audience relationship. The future of the clown in the theatre however, depends on a broadening of the way clown is understood.

There are two trends that limit the potential of the clown as a political character. In the first instance, there is a commercialization of the clown, most evident in McDonald's Ronald McDonald character, but also in the concept of the party clown who makes balloon animals and performs magic tricks. Other perceptions of clown are rooted in a historical perspective. The clown risks being understood only in the context of the circus as an exotic place, the traveling carnival, or as a figure of the past. These historical perceptions that have shaped the clown as a political character have been successful in the past. In thinking to the future towards new political theatre practices, it is uncertain, if these images of clown remain relevant. In August, using a specific clown character was useful to Kohout, but for Barnes it was beneficial to emphasize a broader concept of clown and use the red nose as a semiotic tool.

The emphasis on the clown as carnival positions the clown as more than just a

theatrical convention or character. The clown, as is evident in the work of Brecht, Fo, and the two plays discussed, is a method or a process in the dramatization of politics. The clown suggests a particular philosophy or world outlook that forces a carnivalesque perspective, a perspective that views the world in all its contradictory, unequal, hierarchical complexity. A play need not necessarily have a clown character per se, but might use the clown's performance conventions to explore a particular subject.

The success of this clown philosophy as a strategy of political dissent in art is evident for example in the work of documentary filmmaker, and in many ways clown, Michael Moore. Both Moore's television series and films have received critical acclaim as well as harsh criticism for his blatant, overt, biased politics. The clown philosophy is evident in Moore's documentary style. In a review for Salon.com of Moore's most recent film, Fahrenheit 9/11 (2004), Andrew O'Hehir makes the following argument:

> In the years since "Roger and Me," [Moore] has become an increasingly skillful entertainer and propagandist, probably the closest American parallel to Dario Fo, the Italian radical clown, satirist and Nobel laureate. Moore might be understood as a court jester in the vein of King Lear's Fool, whose burlesques and exaggerations and farcical asides are meant to cast light into shadowy regions where the sober, scrupulously neutral Ivy League guys and gals of mainstream journalism dare not venture.

O'Hehir's comments are reminiscent of Bakhtin's carnival theory. Moore's filmmaking practices are clown like, and through them he offers an alternative perspective that exposes aspects of the official world in such a way that they are also undermined.

A similar tactic is possible, and in many ways, more effective in the theatre. One example is The Noam Chomsky Lectures (1991) by Daniel Brooks and Guillermo

Verdecchia, a play that dramatizes Noam Chomsky's arguments in the context of Canadian politics. Similarly to Moore, Brooks and Verdecchia interpret political and social events from a clownesque perspective, drawing attention to apparent contradictions within the social world.

To consider the clown as a political figure is to place an emphasis on the base roots of the clown's behaviour. The clown need not be a red-nosed character in baggy pants and large shoes. Kolakowski's concept of the philosophy of the jester provides a broader understanding of the clown's politics. He argues: "In every era the jester's philosophy exposes as doubtful what seems most unshakable, reveals the contradictions in what appears obvious and incontrovertible, derides common sense and reads sense into the absurd" (54). To understand the clown in the context of this philosophy establishes a beginning for looking into a future for the clown as a political character. Here it is useful to return to the notion of artist as clown, raised briefly in the introduction. In thinking of the clown's political role, perhaps it is most useful to understand the character of the clown in the role of the playwright or performer. As Kolakowski's jester, the role of the playwright or performer is to be society's clown, to reveal contradictions, and to expose hierarchies and structures of power embedded within the social world.

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